

Fate Likes To Play

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Category: How to Train Your Dragon

Genre: Adventure, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Hiccup, Red Death/Big Dragon, Toothless

Status: Completed

Published: 2014-09-13 07:53:53

Updated: 2014-11-11 17:56:31

Packaged: 2016-04-26 20:01:15

Rating: K+

Chapters: 44

Words: 52,932

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: It should have been simple. Fire off an arrow and whatever girl brings it back gets to marry you. Simple, right? Not when the girl's a different species. Fem!shapeshifting!Toothless. Don't own. Cover art by ShadowPirateMonkey7

1. Tickle me Terrified

He was flying.

Forest sped past beneath him as he soared into the wind, letting it blow around his cheeks and through his hair. He ventured a glance upwards and saw a sky bluer than the sea on a summer's day, bluer than all the bluebells on the island put together. It looked soft and enticing, begging him to stretch his limits; though he wasn't sure he had them. Hiccup tilted his hands towards the expanse of freedom and began ascending into and through the layers of blue.

The first layer was the bluebell blue, and the flowers brushed the exposed skin of his hands, face, and foot softly as he rose through it, gently so as not to disturb the petals. He maneuvered with his foot until he was swooping in large circles above the bank of blossoms and dipped his hand down into them. Soft as rabbit fur and five times prettier than any picture could do justice, he let the tiny flowers sift through his fingers and join their friends below him. A flick of his hands and he was hovering upright, with his toes only inches above the carpet of tiny blue trumpets and his head barely brushing the next layer. A gentle kick and he slid through the next layer.

It tickled as he rose up, because this layer was made of feathers, but not all from the same bird species. Dozens of different colors blended beneath his eyes into a shifting mass of every kind of blue imaginable. Hiccup flew with his heel just grazing the surface of this new floor and giggled as the feathers tickled the bottom of his bare foot. Then the feeling became more insistent and he began

twisting from the force of his laughter. The abrupt, uncontrolled movement sent him tumbling down, out of the skyâ€¦

And into his bed, with his favorite and least formal manservant sitting at the foot of it, tickling his foot with a feather to get him to wake. The servant smiled at his master, also his favorite. "Too big of a day to sleep away, Your Highness." He grinned cheekily at the prince.

"Exactly why I need to stay right here," moaned the young man in the bed as he drew his remaining foot into the warmth of the covers and away from the torture of his manservant Mark. "Gods, I hate court."

"Ah, but it's not just court today, Sire," jabbered Mark as he pulled open the curtains to the window and threw a batch of raw sunlight over the now flinching eyes of his royal charge. "Today you and your brothers get to show off as real men." Hiccup snorted from his place on the bed, now sitting up and removing his foot and stump from beneath the luxurious covers. "Oh, come on. It's not every day a man turns sixteen."

"Yes," groaned Hiccup as Mark handed him his prosthetic. He strapped it on and walked to the wardrobe where most of his clothes were kept. "I just wish that was all that was happening today."

"Oh, come on," chided the dark haired servant. "You're not still nervous about that? With all the practice you've put in? I should know." He picked up the prince's discarded pillows and set them down on the bed again. "I'm the one who had to fetch all your arrows."

"You didn't have to do anything," commented Hiccup from behind the changing screen.

"Your dad wanted to see you shooting, not picking up what you were shooting. Now get dressed and cleaned up. I'll be back with breakfast." Mark exited the room just as Hiccup came out from behind the screen.

The mirror began its assault of his short, scrawny frame, ganglier than a colt, thinner than a string bean, and missing a limb to boot. Honestly, you'd think he'd take after his two older brothers, even if they were two and six years older than him. But no, they apparently got the showy muscle gene and he hid behind a mind no one appreciated. Ah well, at least he could joke around with Mark. he actually understood the prince's humor.

And as the youngest son, his clothes weren't much to look at either. The tunic was green, a step up from the browner tones on the townsfolk's daily garb, but the only ornamentation was the gold clasp holding the fur cape around his shoulders. The crest of his family, although polished just the day before, was still just the plain lion with a diadem on its head and a hammer between its paws. His brothers had clasps with rubies in the lion's eyes and silver inlay in the diadem. Those had been gifts to them from him last Christmas. But even with the clasp, it wasn't an eye-catching ensemble. He'd hoped to look at least acceptable when his bride showed up later today.

Mark came back in the room with the tray and, surprisingly, the prince's weapon complete with sheathe and belt over one arm. It was an unusually fine weapon, tempered steel with a bit of gold filigree laid into the handle. The pommel was a polished black marble held in place by a cage of steel wires with the occasional silver one woven into the mix. Most people never bothered looking at him long enough to notice the finer details of the blade, but it was quite lovely, if he did say so himself. Thor knew how long it had taken to get the thing right. And he would know. He'd made it.

With a screech of wood against stone, Hiccup pulled out the chair from the table and Mark laid the tray down in front of him but didn't take his hands off the wooden table top. He looked his friend and prince straight in the eyes. Hiccup cocked an eyebrow at the stare. "What?"

"Just thinking."

Oh, now Hiccup was curious. "What are you thinking?"

Mark let a smile crack his face open. "Just that whatever girl marries you is getting a fine piece of manhood, my friend." Hiccup swatted at the already ducking servant and watched as his friend dodged out of the room, leaving him to his breakfast and brooding. After today, he would be sixteen. After today, he would have a bride.

Welcome to my latest story! This one did not come from my need to tip a cliché on its head, but from a rather intriguing folk tale that needed a little elaborating. The first person to review will have one question answered.

**And before you ask, Mark was inspired by BBC's Merlin. **

2. Shoot!

"And so it is with great pleasure that I welcome you to this, the birthday of my three sons as they take hold of their future with both hands. For we all knowâ€¦" Hiccup zoned out after the first five minutes of lengthy speeches, most of them from nobles who would never let a tree grow in their gardens for fear of blocking out arrows. It was a terrible idea for wartime, but, unfortunately, a great strategy for today, as his father was about to explain. "Today, my sons will choose a bride. By the code of our tradition, each will take his finest bow and one arrow, shooting it into the sky. Whatever fine maiden returns the shaft will be the wife of the prince whose arrow she holds. I discovered my wife this way, as did my father and grandfather before me, with twelve generations of kings doing the same before them."

Something kicked Hiccup's prosthetic under the table. He looked to his right and saw his younger older brother staring with rapt attention at his father. The youngest prince rolled his eyes. When were they going to learn that that didn't work when you hit steel instead of flesh? But this was his brother, after all. The one who spent more time hacking up training dummies in a day than he did reading in a month. He'd probably never notice the kick hadn't hurt, but thank goodness his eldest brother was on the other side of his father. He might actually have kicked the flesh leg.

Finally the speeches were through and it was time to move the gathering to the palace front lawn for the actual shooting. The three princes, Hubert, Hamish, and Hiccup stood in front of the massive crowd of nobles, mostly men, given the nature of the day. Three of the knights came forward and presented each prince with a bow and arrow. Gawain brought up Hiccup's and whispered a "good luck" in the boy's ear before walking back to the crowd to stand with the others. The prince smiled crookedly. Of course Gawain would wish him luck, with the way they'd been training so hard these past few weeks, working on aim and velocity and a lot of other things that his other brothers didn't have to worry about, with their natural athleticism and inborn talent for the bow.

The order to draw was bellowed across the palace grounds. Hiccup notched the arrow on the bowstring and tried to pull the feathers back until they brushed his cheek, tightening his core as he did so. He managed to get it all the way, but knew he couldn't hold it for long. "Aim," shouted the drill sergeant. All three princes raised their bows up, though the angles were different, with the elder princes holding it almost directly up and Hiccup angling so the arrow was at about fifteen degrees above perpendicular with the ground. "Fire!" and at that moment, several things happened at once.

Hiccup took a step forward with his left leg to steady himself for the shot and fell into a rabbit hole. The end of the prosthetic plunged down into the earth beneath him and the surprise made him lose his grip on the string. The arrow shot into the woods that bordered the castle grounds and the string snapped back into position, slapping against his hand. No doubt there would be a welt there later on. While the nobles rushed forward to congratulate the two elder princes for their excellent shots, Gawain and a few of the older knights helped Hiccup back to his feet and tried to brush him off. "Good try, lad," soothed Gawain. "And who knows? You might get a wood nymph or a flower girl. They're a lot more fun than nobles." Hiccup smiled at the older man. It was good to know that someone at least was on his side.

The nobles and their tittering wives followed the king and three princes, one rather disheveled, back through the castle entrance and into the dining room where a lavish feast was prepared. The king ascended the stairs to the high table where seven seats now perched, instead of the four that had been there earlier. The princes and their father lined up behind their seats, with an empty one next to each of the boys. The king cleared his throat. "Now, friends, we wait on the whims of fate and fortune. Let my good sons gain brides worthy of them to sit at their sides. Let us celebrate until they arrive." He pulled out his chair, a bit more like a throne actually, and sank down into it as his sons did the same. The rest of the crowd quickly followed.

The low hum of conversation in the hall was occasionally broken by outbursts of laughter, the snapping of bones as someone pulled free a chicken or goose wing. His brothers were engaged in conversation with their father, with the seats meant for their brides on either side of them. Hiccup sat, blocked off by two empty chairs and listened to the whir of noise around him as he munched on some of the fruit the kitchens had managed to procure for the feast. He gazed around the room at the various noblemen and their wives. No daughters were present of course, as they'd have to give up their chances of being

Queen to do so. But it wasn't really the people he was interested in as much as their metalwork.

Several of the men had brought swords. A few had precious stones or designs crafted into the metal of the handles, which were the only part he could see at all clearly, and he itched to get his hands on them to get a better look. The duke sitting at the leftmost table at the end nearest the raised platform where the royalty sat had a very nice one, withâ€|were those diamond chips in the pommel? He had to get a closer look.

Hiccup rose out of his chair with the pretense of getting another bunch of grapes when the doors at the front of the hall opened and a woman walked in. Striding up between the center tables, she trailed her embroidered gown through the rushes on the floor and, when she reached the high table, held out an arrow for the king's inspection. While the king looked over the shaft, Hiccup got a good look at who would probably be his sister-in-law. He used grey goose feathers, and the feathers on the tip of the arrow were too white to be his.

The precious metals on her person were very finely crafted, like the gold thread embroidery that ran all the way down the billowing sleeves and around the square neckline. Her braid was also bedecked with jeweled hair clips, probably silver, set in a wing design. This was a noble's daughter for sure, and Hiccup wondered which of older males in the room was about to have his daughter marry into royalty and boost his standing. He hoped it wasn't him, even though it probably wasn't; she was at least twenty-four and he was hoping for someone a little closer to his age.

The king stood up. "This arrow is tipped with swan feathers. Hamish, this lovely young lady is your bride." The middle son circled the table and took his bride's hand and kissed it, although his eyes lingered on the gold rose pinned to her bodice. Hiccup wanted to roll his eyes at his brother's lack of subtlety. The new bride took her place at Hamish's side and the occupants of the hall resumed their seats to wait for the next bride.

****Second, and longer, chapter is up and running. I'm trying to take things slowly. Next chapter, Hiccup's bride shows up.****

****Please drop a review.****

3. A Dragon?

Hiccup picked at his plate of honeyed cornbread as he talked with the girl next to him. Five hours into the feast and his brothers' future wives had already shown up. Hubert's wife, a younger girl from the merchant class named Clarice, chatted with Hiccup about the smith who'd made her bronze pin. "He moved here from a country south of here, and he made the most delicate trinkets. Did he make your pin too?" She pointed at the clasp above his right shoulder.

"No," he answered the older girl. "I made it."

"Really?" Her eyes widened. "Can I see it?"

"Sure." He removed the gold circle and handed it to her, keeping the cloak secured with one hand. He watched as she turned it over and

inspected the fastening mechanism, expecting to see her face light up at the fine craftsmanship.

But as the excellent workmanship became more and more apparent, so did her frown. "It's very well made," she said as she smiled at him, not showing her teeth and pursing her lips slightly.

He knew that look. "What's wrong with it?"

"Oh nothing," she answered airily. "I just didn't think the royal family would have to work with their hands much, outside of training."

His high opinion of his newest sister-in-law flew out the window and he prayed to whatever god would listen that he got someone who wasn't after an easy life. At least Hamish's wife knew something about what royal responsibility entailed, having had a taste of it herself due to her higher station. The girl handing back his clasp expected to be a trophy queen and someone who actually helped rule the kingdom. Then a thought struck him and he had to turn away from the girl to hide his smile. That wakeup call would be something to see.

On the other side of the Hubert and his new wife, the king was becoming uneasy. He called one of the servants over. "The banquet's almost over and Hiccup's bride still hasn't shown."

"Well sir," the man appeased, "his shot went straight into the woods. It's possible no one has found it yet."

His Majesty King Stoick huffed. "Then we'll wait all night if we have to! This is how my father, my grandfather, and his grandfather found their brides, and I'm not about to break that tradition just because my son is a lousy shot!"

After about an hour of being ignored by the girl next to him, Hiccup heard a small chirp. He looked up from his plate. Had a bird flown through one of the open windows by mistake and gotten trapped inside the room? Or perhaps it was one of the smaller dragon breeds. They did like the warmth of the hearth. He looked around for a flash of feathers or scales and spotted the poor little thing on top of one of the rafters behind the place where his family sat. He excused himself quietly, not that anyone really noticed, and slipped out of his chair and behind the row of grand seats.

He looked up again and saw a flash of green scales. He smiled. "Come down, I won't hurt you." The dragon gave a sharp whistle and he returned with a whistle of his own. There was a soft fluttering of wings and the little green dragon landed on the floor in front of him. "Hey," he spoke softly as he sat down in front of the small creature. "How'd you get in here?" The dragon turned its head and looked at one of the open windows higher up in the room. Hiccup followed its gaze and chuckled. "Oh. Right."

He looked back at the scaly little thing and noticed something. "What's that at your feet?" In answer, the beast unclenched its talons from around its burden and rolled it toward him as it stared up at his face. He picked up the object and inspected it. It was an arrow with goose fledging. It was the best for arrows, and the kind he liked to use. He took a look at the shaft. It was a straight stick, without knots and smooth to the touch. He reached the

arrowhead and stopped. It had a nick in one side.

The arrow he'd shot that morning had had a nick in one side.

A dragon had brought back his arrow.

Well there went his hopes of having a nice, ordinary family life.

The dragon cocked her head to the side and looked at the boy. Why wasn't he moving? He just sat there, staring at her arrow. But while he looked still on the outside, his mind was running a mile a minute. A dragon. He couldn't marry a dragon. He'd just hide the arrow and say that it got stuck in the branches of a tree or something. No, that wouldn't work. If this went on much longer, Stoick would go and check on the arrow to make sure it was in a place where someone could find it. Could he rip off the feathers? That would keep it from being identified. No, the arrowhead was his own forged steel, with the flat leaf shape he used. No one else made their arrowheads that way, and he'd need more than just his hands to get that off. What was he going to do? _What was he going to do?! _

He was jolted out of his shock by something brushing against his leg. He looked down and saw the little dragon curled up against his good leg. He stared at the miniature reptile and began to notice little things about the animal. The duller green colors marked it as a female, but the fact that its back spines were almost done growing in marked it at around his age. Well, at least that was one good thing about the situation. He reached out gingerly and ran a finger over its scaly side. Smooth, warm, and a little bumpy. The back rose and fell with every breath of the little creature that would spend the rest of her life with him, if his father decided to stick with tradition. And he would. There really wasn't a way out of this for him. Oh well, he supposed it could have been worse. At least this breed of dragon didn't live in the water or bellow.

He slid his hand under her front feet and she raised her head to look at him. He was taken aback for a moment by just how green her eyes were, quite pretty really. She climbed onto his arm and perched there, thankfully using her feet and not claws to stay in position. Slowly, Hiccup got back up and walked back towards the table where his family sat, dragon on one arm and arrow clutched in the other hand.

Once he was right behind his father's chair, he put his head around the massive back and asked, "Dad, could I talk to you for a second?"

"No son, I'm trying to concentrate," King Stoick replied as he brushed off his youngest in favor of conversing with his oldest.

"But Dad, "

"Not right now, son."

"Dad, my arrow came back."

That caught the king's attention. "Well where is she?" He looked around at the various doors, in the crowd.

Hiccup took a deep breath and gave the little dragon the arrow, which she promptly clamped in her jaws. He held out the arm with the dragon so his father could clearly see both dragon and arrow. "Right here."

Stoick laughed.

****And so the little lady appears. She's modeled after the version of Toothless from the books. What did you think of her introduction?****

****Please review! The first person to do so will get one question answered. And if you recognize the folk tale, please withhold the twists so you don't spoil it for others.****

4. Stuck With Me

After far longer than was comfortable for the boy or the dragon, the king's chuckling quieted enough for him to speak coherently. "No, son. Really, where is she?"

"Right here." He thrust the dragon closer to the man's face, making him recoil slightly. "Look, she's got my arrow in her mouth."

Stoick inspected the arrow in the thing's mouth. It did have the goose feathers Hiccup liked to use, and the steel arrowhead the boy made himself. But could he really bond his son to a dragon? Tradition was all well and good when your sons shot well. Stoick's arrow had landed in the garden of his sweetheart, so he'd had no complaints. But the only one of Hiccup's generation who'd chosen a worthy bride was Hamish. He looked away from the dragon's curious eyes and at the hall. He could tell from their faces that they'd all heard.

Well, he'd have to put up a good front until he could find a way out of this mess for his youngest. "Ladies and Gentlemen, the last of the three brides has been chosen." Then he muttered, "stand" to those sitting at his table. The two elder princes brought their wives to their feet and Hiccup stood straight with the little dragon perched on his right shoulder, proudly warbling to the world. The court, though a little confused about the dragon and lack of a third princess, clapped and cheered. The king silenced them with a wave of his hand. "The festivities have now concluded, and you are all invited to the castle day after tomorrow for the wedding." The court filed out of the castle and into their gilded carriages, speeding off to their mansions. The three princes, two princesses-to-be, king, and dragon waved them off before returning to their chambers.

They gathered in the library and Stoick called for Geoffrey, the librarian and keeper of the records. He bowed to the king and princes, and if he bowed a little lower for Hiccup, no one noticed. "For what do I have the pleasure, my lords?"

"We need to see the laws involved with the bride choosing," Stoick said. "There's been a bit of trouble."

"Do you mean Hiccup's choice of wife?" he asked as a smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. It wasn't every day one saw a king flustered. "I'll get the record right away."

"I'll help," piped up Hiccup, and he and his little lady disappeared into the shelves following the old codger, as Hamish liked to call Geoffrey. Once the two were out of earshot of the other royals, Hiccup asked Geoffrey, "So? What are the laws?"

The man turned and stared Hiccup right in the eye. "Let me ask you something first." Hiccup shut his mouth and nodded. "Do you want that little dragon," he nodded at her, "to be your wife?" The prince couldn't keep the confusion off his face and the librarian laughed. "Hiccup, you could do a lot worse. Oh, don't give me that," he scolded as Hiccup raised a sarcastic eyebrow at him. "Garden Dragons, like the one on your shoulder, are very pleasant creatures. Intensely loyal, very friendly, and not very dangerous, and from the looks of it she's already very attached to you." The dragon trilled and nuzzled the side of Hiccup's face. A smile crept across the old man's face as he watched Hiccup grin at the small creature and run a hand down her wings, making her eyes close in pleasure. "I'd take a dragon over a girl any day, in terms of a friend."

"But that's the thing, Geoffrey," moaned Hiccup as a frown replaced his smile. "I'd love to keep her as a friend, but not a wife. I mean, I do want a family. And as much as I'd love her as a companion instead of some girl five years older than me, she can't give me that."

"But would you want her if that wasn't a factor?" persisted the old bookkeeper.

Hiccup thought about the girls he'd grown up with. Those from the noble and gentry class turned their noses up at him for working with his hands all the time, just like his new sister-in-law had done earlier. Town girls laughed at his slight build, and he didn't think anyone with lower status would be able to see beyond his title. He didn't even know if his own mother had loved him, with the way she died from complications during his delivery. He looked back at the little dragon perched on his shoulder. Her eyes, the first thing he'd noticed, were so close to his. The dragon let out a little whine. Was she asking him to choose her? "What do you think?" he commented, half kidding. But when she trilled and began rubbing her scaly cheeks against his again, he decided. "I guess you're stuck with me, then."

The dragon roared in delight and began licking Hiccup's face until it was half coated in dragon slobber. He laughed as the tiny little tongue tickled his cheek and batted at the dragon, trying to get her to stop. Geoffrey grinned at the two. "That's good."

Hiccup looked up from the little dragon. "Why?"

"Because the laws about this particular tradition don't allow for anything else. You would have had to marry her even if you'd chosen differently. At least this way, you'll be happy." He patted the boy on the shoulder. "I'll go and tell your father." He left the two to their laughter, very happy that the only boy to set foot in this room since his mother's death had found someone else who could appreciate him, even if it was only a dragon.

He walked out from behind the shelf and up the aisle to where the king stood with his sons and their wives, waiting. "My lord, I have

read the scrolls."

"And what do they say? Surely tradition allowed a way out of this situation?" questioned the king.

"I'm sorry, but they demand that tradition be followed." Three, two, oneâ€|

"WHAT!? You mean my son is actually going to have to marry that beast?"

Geoffrey was tempted to plug his ears to stop the volume of Stoick's rage from deafening him. "Yes." The king huffed and stalked off, Hubert and Hamish following, each with a bride on their arm. The librarian smiled and turned to the back of the library where a boy and his dragon were getting better acquainted.

I'd like to address a small problem that's cropped up in several reviews. Many people are concern/disappointed because I used book Toothless. But who ever said I wouldn't also bring movie Toothless into it? He had a flying dream for a reason, people!

Since you guys have been so great with the reviews, and I can't seem to stop writing chapters, I'll give you a challenge. After ten reviews for any of he chapters in this story? I'll give you the next one a day early. Sound good?

5. Milady Toothless

Hiccup opened the door to his rooms and let his bride fly around, brushing the ceiling with her wing tips before flipping over and diving into the bed for a crash landing, only to smack her forehead against one of the posts. He caught her before she fell and laughed at the small dragon in his arms, leg flailing, wings crumpled against his hands as she peered up at him with those big green eyes. "Well, milady, I think you need a name." Her response was to yawn at him, putting her pink gums on display. "Huh. Toothless." And he had to laugh at the absurdity of it. Out of all the dragons he could have married, he had to get the one beast in the whole of the country without teeth of any kind. Ah well. At least he wouldn't have to worry about fangs biting into him when he attempted to kiss her.

The little lady freed herself from his awkward arms, flew to the bed, and curled up rather sweetly on one of his pillows. He looked out the window and saw that her actions were entirely appropriate. Only the faintest hint of purple bedecked the horizon. The youth grabbed his nightshirt and headed towards the screen, undoing the clasp and draping his fur cape over the back of a chair along the way. He sat down on the chair provided, removed his boot, and began unfastening the straps of his prosthetic leg. The first buckle loosened and he heard a chirp above him. He looked up and locked gazes with a pair of eyes set in a draconic but somehow visibly concerned face. "Well hello Milady." He smiled at the little dragon as she fluttered down to his feet. Sitting on her haunches with her tail for balance, the little dragon reached up and rested her front paws on the place where the wooden top of the fake leg met the bit of shin he had left.

"It's fine." She snorted, a lick of flame appearing at the edge of

her nostrils. He laughed at her disbelief. "No really, look." He finished undoing the straps and held up the stump for inspection. "See? Completely fine." She whined, lower and with a lilt at the end. "It happened a long time ago. Now, if you don't mind, I would like some privacy."

She squeaked and bolted out of the screened off area, face turning a darker green. He laughed, heartier this time. So even dragons could blush. And just how many sounds could the little dragon make? He stripped off his pants and shirt and tugged the nightshirt over his head and thrust his arms into the sleeves. He walked back into the main part of the room and looked around for his scaly companion. Whistling to him, she flew from her perch on top of the fur cape and fluttered down onto his shoulder. "So now I'm demoted to perch?" she warbled at him and started nuzzling his cheek again. He leaned into the touch, stroking her outermost wing bone with a careful finger. It wasn't the intimacy he'd expected from a wife, but perhaps this was better. He couldn't have an awkward conversation when the other participant couldn't talk, and there was no pressure for certain kinds of activities to bring about heirs.

He walked over to the bed and watched as his little lady curled up once more on the pillow nearest the right side of the bed. She yawned again, but snapped her mouth shut and glared at Hiccup, who giggled at her indignation. What? He'd just wanted to feel her gums to see if she had any teeth coming in. It would have given him a better estimation of what her age was. But she obviously wasn't going to give him the chance.

"Well then, Milady Toothless, you can keep your gums to yourself." To his surprise, she warbled and chirped at him. "Youâ€|noâ€|It was a joke!" But she growled insistently at him. "Alright, Milady Toothless." She let out another of those pleased roars and curled up much closer to him than before. He waited a few moments and soon the steady rise and fall of the little lady's back indicated even breathing and sleep. He pulled the covers up over himself and her by extension, and when she didn't react to the fabric gliding over her scaly skin, he decided to try something. Cautiously, he stretched out a hand and laid it over her back.

When she moved under his fingers, he snapped his hand back and began berating himself for trying something on the first night. His brothers weren't even allowed in the same room as their brides before the wedding, and here he was almost cuddling with his. Yes, she was a dragon, but still! Then he heard a small plaintive sound.

She was whimpering.

Did she want him to touch her?

Gingerly, preparing to draw back at the first sign of trouble, he extended his hand again and laid it over the sleeping dragon. To his astonishment, she scooted down underneath his hand so his palm rested over the folds of her sensitive wings, not just the edges of them. Once she ceased moving, he allowed his arm to relax and his hand to rest on the bumpy but somehow smooth surface of his bride-to-be. He was glad he'd chosen her, even if she did make him the sore thumb of the kingdom. Oh well. That was nothing new.

When Mark came in the next morning, both prince and dragon were lying

on their sides pressed up against each other. Hiccup had both arms wrapped around Milady like a teddy bear and her legs were splayed out over his chest with her head resting in the crook between his jaw and neck. Some would think it looked adorable, but to Mark, it just looked uncomfortable. Still, without archery practice this morning, he could afford to let the two sleep a little longer. He didn't fancy trying to wake a sleeping dragon, smaller than a loaf of bread or not.

****How was it? I'm trying to create intimacy between a boy and a dragon. How am I doing? And do you guys like the name?****

****Please review!****

6. Dresses

Hiccup woke to Milady Toothless butting the top of her head against his chin. He wasn't quite awake yet, so he didn't notice their position right away. Then the little dragon wiggled in his arms. He took one look at where his hands were and withdrew them so quickly that Milady Toothless tumbled onto the uncovered mattress and squeaked as she landed upside down. The outrage in that tiny sound halted Hiccup's racing pulse and made him laugh again. She was so cute in the morning.

She reoriented herself from her upside down position and sat, face turned away from him, snout in the air. He laughed again. "Alright, I'm sorry." She didn't budge. "Is it really a big deal that I thought you were adorable this morning?" At that, her shoulders softened and she pivoted her long neck to gaze back at him. He smiled gently and offered one of the sausages Mark must have brought in earlier. "Would you like some breakfast?" She pounced on the treat.

That was how the head seamstress of the castle found the pair, peacefully eating breakfast at the table in their rooms. She approached the prince who, she noted with a suppressed giggle, was still in his night clothes. "Sire?"

He looked up from the piece of toast he was currently smearing with jam. "Yes?"

"We're ready for the lady's fitting."

Hiccup's eyes snapped open and he stammered out, "But what would she need to be fitted for? I mean she'sâ€¦well,"

The older woman smiled at the man she'd known since he was toddling around the corridors. "I'm sure we'll find some way to turn her into a bride."

"Alright." He turned to the little dragon looking at him expectantly. "Well, would you like to go get outfitted, Milady Toothless?" She chirped and flew to the older woman, settling gingerly on her shoulder. Hiccup laughed. "I believe Milady Toothless wishes to be fitted."

"Milady Toothless?" The seamstress asked.

"Yes. I named her last night. It's only Milady around company,

though." He didn't think his father would take kindly to a bride named Toothless. The seamstress nodded and walked out with the little dragon balanced precariously on her shoulder.

After a few minutes, they entered the room where the other two brides were being outfitted in their finery for tomorrow's festivities. White silk and lace were matched to complexions and pearls woven through hair by the many assistants hired to prepare the women for the big day. One of the brides, the nobleman's daughter, was having her dress hemmed and the other was selecting the style of lace trim for the edging of her veil when the head seamstress walked in with the smallest and sweetest of the brides.

The other two were immediately abandoned in favor of a designer's favorite challenge; the impossible task of turning a disaster into a dream. In this case, the disaster was a dragon bride. One whipped out a cloth measuring tape and the torture began.

And these ladies clearly did nothing halfway. First, it was from the tip of her nose to the end of her tail, making her sneeze. Her wings were manhandled into their fully extended position and measured, just before the tape constricted around her chest. Her waist was next, just above the junction where her back legs joined her body, and the girls cooed over the difference between the two measurements. What a regular girl wouldn't do to have those proportions. The length of her neck and space between her ears was measured next, although she couldn't fathom what they might need those for. Finally, after they measured the length of each leg, the seamstress let her rest on the back of a chair near where one of the other brides waited as she and her mob of assistants crowded around the design station.

After five minutes of brainstorming, a few of the girls were sent away to tend to the more conventional dresses and the hemming and selecting resumed, but the other brides couldn't help but notice that their attendants kept glancing over at the dragon perched on the chair or towards the head seamstress whose eyes were glued on the little creature as she endlessly sketched and discarded the drawings in balls of inadequacy. Finally, one of the assistants walked up to her superior and offered, "Why not let her have an opinion?" She gestured towards the scaly miss.

The elder designer looked up from her sketchpad and the girl prepared for a lecture on disrespect, but instead she was complimented. "How silly of me. Of course I should have asked her. Who knows, Milady might actually have an opinion." She smirked to herself at the absurdity of it, but nonetheless brought her current design up to the dragon for inspection. The dragon took one look at the heavily ruffled collar, took her claw, and scratched over it. Well, if that didn't mean no, the seamstress wondered what did. She scrapped the drawing and began another one, this time without the ruffles but retaining the high collar.

Milady Toothless hopped down from the back of the chair and rested her belly on the cushioned seat. The seamstress came forward with the sketchpad again. But this time Milady was going to be more exact in her opinion. She flew to the design station, picked up an ink pot, and carried it over to her chair where the woman waited, jaw slightly agape at the beast's intelligence. Toothless dipped her claw into the pot and drew a few lines, cutting off the collar at the base of her neck, using a halter design to free up her wings, and adding a

splendid train to cover her tail and back legs. The woman smiled at her. "It seems His Highness had good reason to name you Milady. Shall we go look at fabrics?" The dragon chirped and lifted into the air, heading in the direction of the rack of lace choices.

Sophia shrieked as the girl pinning her hem stuck her with yet another of the blasted things. "I could have had my family seamstress come and fit me for a dress. I don't think you're paying attention."

The head walked up to her and said quite sternly, "Well I don't know how the Nobility conducts such matters, but I assure you that as the king's personal wardrobe outfitters, you won't find finer work."

She sneered at the woman. "At least those employed by my family pay attention to their clients. You seem to have forgotten there are three brides, not just the scaly one." The older woman rolled her eyes, to the noblewoman's distain. "Personally, I don't see what's so lovely about her. She's a scaly, dirty dragon who just happened to grab the pretty stick with feathers on the end. But no, everyone within fifteen feet of the creature suddenly finds her so lovely."

"I agree." Sophia looked over to the other human bride, Clarice. She wasn't bad for a merchant's daughter, with refined taste, even if her name was a bit unfortunate. "But then what did you expect Prince Hiccup to wed? He'd have been lucky to get a scullery maid. But personally, I think they make a splendid match." The girls sniggered to each other. Tomorrow, the whole kingdom would see the difference between a rose petal complexion and a scaly one. In that moment, Fate laughed.

****Try imagining a sleeker, more elegant version of a dog wedding dress for Toothless. This is our first bit of rivalry between the girls and the dragon, and believe me, it get's better.****

7. The Wedding

On a chair in his chambers with his elbows on his knees and hands buried in his hair, Hiccup bemoaned his situation as he waited for Mark to come and tell him that everyone was prepared to proceed with the ceremony that would permanently bond him to a different species. He knew what he was getting into, or at least what was expected of them, but she didn't. She was a dragon! What if she'd just brought back the arrow as a courtesy and once things got boring, would leave not realizing that she'd promised to stay with him forever? What if her life span was shorter than his, so that their marriage broke before he'd even reached his thirties? What was the life expectancy for dragons that size?

He started rocking back and forth, wrinkling the white cape hung around his shoulders and joined with the same clasp that had decorated his brown fur one what seemed like a lifetime of trouble ago. The decision had seemed so easy when Geoffrey first proposed the idea that he actually go through with the marriage, but now he was second guessing everything. Could he do this? Could she do this?

Mark poked his head through the doorway. "Sire, it's time."

Hiccup uncurled himself and walked into the hall, where Mark grabbed him by the shoulder and started brushing him down. "What are you doing?" asked the anxious prince.

"I'm making sure you're at least presentable for your bride," the boy grunted out as he attempted to straighten out some of the more prevalent wrinkles in the white dress tunic.

An eye roll. "My bride is a dragon."

Another eye roll. "Well, she certainly dressed up for you, Sire."

>That caught his attention. "Have you seen her?"<p>

"Nope," replied the boy with a grin, "but the seamstresses have been buzzing about her dress most of yesterday and today. You wouldn't want a dragon to upstage you, my friend." That got a laugh out of the reluctant groom and the two hurried down the corridor to the Great Hall where the wedding was waiting.

In the tradition of their family, all three weddings took place at the same time. The three princes waited at the front of the room as the slow wedding march sounded through the room and up to the vaulted ceiling. The procession made its way towards the front of the room, although Hiccup barely registered the different couples, as the only person he recognized was his best man was Gawain as he walked up the aisle with a girl Clarice had probably chosen from her friends in town. He would have chosen Mark, but his father did have certain standards. He had managed to slip the man in as Milady's handler for the ceremony, though. Once the knight was at his side, the last of the wedding party made its entrance and the first bride strode up the aisle. He had to admit, Clarice and Sophia did look quite splendid in their gowns, faces veiled for modesty. The crowd sighed at the lovely figures as they strode up to join their future husbands, but were interrupted by a string of warbles and chirps.

Hiccup looked up in the direction of the dragon song and saw his bride literally gliding in after Sophia. He didn't know what they'd made the train out of, because it floated behind her, fanned out on the air as she swooped down and landed on Mark's outstretched arm, letting the train and veil fall neatly behind her as she stood tall and proud for the crowd of onlookers. Mark and Hiccup smiled as the mutterings at the strangeness of it were outweighed by the coos of the ladies. She really was quite adorable.

The ladies joined the princess at the front of the room and were blessed by the priest before they sat down for the beginning of the mass. The usual readings and ritual words were said and Hiccup, seeing that the other couples held hands, gently placed his palm over one of Toothless' paws where it sat primly on the cushion of the chair. When she didn't protest, he kept it there.

Finally, the vows began. Hubert, as the oldest, was called up first with Clarice. The priest asked for their promise and their "I do"s echoed in the silent hall. Hiccup hoped there was at least a small note of happiness in his brother's words. This was his wedding day after all, even if his bride was less than ideal. But then, he wasn't one to talk.

Then the ring bearer came forward and Hiccup started to panic. Where was he supposed to put the ring? He looked at Milady's other paw, the one not covered by his hand. The claws might work, unless the ring was too large. What would he do then? He studied her ear where it emerged from the lacy veil. Perhaps he could put it around the base of one of her ears. Yes that might work! Then she twitched her ear to the side to better hear the old priest's words and that idea was tossed out the window. One twitch and she'd fling the ring right off. Perhaps the tip of her tail? No, that had the same problems as the ear. Loud clapping interrupted his frantic thoughts and he looked up at his brother who was drawing back from his first kiss as a married man. He was running out of time.

While Hamish and Sophia exchanged their vows, rings, and kiss, Hiccup looked around frantically for the boy with the rings for him and Milady. If he got a better look at the rings, he might have an idea of where to place them. Oh no. How was Toothless going to put the ring on his finger? She didn't have any hands! For that matter, how was he supposed to kiss a girl with no lips? The second round of applause marked his exit of the frying pan and entrance into the fire. Shaking slightly, he rose.

Mark picked up Toothless and extended an arm for her to perch on and walked over to where Hiccup stood in front of the priest. "Prince Hiccup Haddock," began the priest, "do you take Milady Toothless as your lawfully wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do you part?"

The teen looked at the dragon in front of him, wings and tail and big green eyes, and took the plunge. "I do."

The priest turned from the young man and smiled indulgently at the dragon. "Milady Toothless," Thank goodness someone had told him her name before the ceremony, "do you take Hiccup Haddock as your lawfully wedded husband to have and to hold from this day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish; from this day forward until death do you part?" She roared her consent.

The boy came forward with the rings and Hiccup saw, to his relief, that one was strung on a chain. As the priest babbled on about unity and fidelity, Hiccup took the chain and unclasped it. The man gave him permission, and he placed the chain, barely the size of a bracelet, around the neck of his wife. She closed her eyes as he did so, and when he looked up from the clasp, he met those big green eyes that sent a clear message. _Good job. _He smiled at her.

Then Toothless grabbed his ring with her lips very delicately and sat there, waiting for the priest. He gave her the go ahead and Hiccup slid the tip of his ring finger through the circle of metal as she held it in her jaws. She tapped it all the way down with a wing tip and looked back up at him. He whispered "Good job," and she positively glowed.

The priest beamed at the controversial couple. "I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your bride."

Mark held out his arm so Toothless could get close enough, but she

hopped off of the servant and onto the prince's shoulder. He startled and moved his arm up to regain his balance when she wiggled over onto his upper arm. Once he saw what she was doing, Hiccup wanted to laugh. He moved his arm until it was almost in front of him, and Toothless bent down and pressed her scaly green lips to his pink ones. Hiccup smiled. Maybe they could do this after all.

I didn't use the full ceremony, but I did put in what I think are the most important bits. Does Hiccup's attitude about it seem real enough?

Please Review!

8. Armor

Stoick watched as Hubert and Hamish kissed their wives goodbye at the castle gates and rode off into the woods to go hunting with their men. The two boys had been doing that more and more frequently since they'd gotten married about a month ago, and from the scowls of the princesses, he could bet he knew why. Ah well, at least one of his sons was happy.

The girls returned to their bedrooms, no doubt to complain to their servants about the two princes, and Stoick headed for the forge he had built for his youngest son one year as a thirteenth birthday present. As he walked closer to the small building, he noticed more and more of the older knights and female servants pausing at the window of the forge. What were they looking at?

"No, I need that part of the design! Toothless, get your claws off the paper, you're smudging it." Hiccup's voice yelled out with a trace of impatience.

Stoick squeezed through the doorway of the forge and asked, "What're you working on, son?"

"A leather guard for my right arm. This lady," the boy gestured towards Milady with a thumb, "Decided to sink her claws into me yesterday, so I decided I needed some extra protection. But she keeps messing with the design! I mean, look!" He held up the parchment with a big inky X over one of the straps on the shoulder section of the leather apparatus. "I need that strap for stability, but Mrs. High and Mighty over there thinks it makes the thing look ugly."

There was a grumble from behind the big man and Milady flew over his head, landing in Hiccup's hair and pulling on it. The boy flailed beneath her. "Okay, I'm sorry! Just stop that!" She let go and flew to her father-in-law's shoulder, perching on his armor. That gave Hiccup an idea. "Hey, maybe it doesn't have to be leather." He scrambled back to the desk he used for designing and Toothless joined him a moment later as he mumbled, "If I could modify a pauldron and hook it to the leather upper arm brace. Oh, but that'd probably be uncomfortable for you." The little dragon snorted and Hiccup sighed. "Fine, I'll keep the pauldron. What about a gauntlet for my arm?"

She drew her head back from the parchment and hissed softly. Hiccup nodded. "Okay. No gauntlet. What about a hawking glove instead?"

She tilted her head and blinked at him. He laughed. "Let's go hunt one down. Then you can decide." She chirped and jumped onto his outstretched arm, rubbing her cheek against his. He laughed and rubbed back. They headed out of the small building over to the section of the grounds where Stoick kept his birds and the equipment that went along with them. The king watched as one of the falcon handlers walked up to the youngest prince and asked what he was looking for. Hiccup gestured towards Milady and began telling the story, complete with dramatic arm movements that made Stoick laugh at his son's exuberance. He seemed livelier since Milady had joined their household.

The king walked back into the throne room and sat himself in the massive chair that represented his kingship. As much as he liked the affect the little dragon had on his youngest son, the unconventional nature of their marriage made the kingdom uneasy. He had to do something to assure them that the beast was a worthy wife, before they started calling for an annulment. That would be too messy, for everyone involved.

One of the other princesses, Clarice, came into the room and approached the king. "My Lord," she said, curtsying, "Princess Sophia and I would like to prepare a meal for the family tomorrow, if that is agreeable."

He snapped his fingers. That was it! "Of course you may, my dear," he smiled at the young woman. "In fact, all three princesses may prepare a meal of their choosing and bring it tonight for dinner. I am quite interested to see which of my daughters-in-law is most able in the kitchens." There. If Hiccup's wife could sufficiently carry out her wifely duties, he could use that to persuade the people that it was a decent enough match to go forward with.

Clarice smiled under cover of her reverently bent head. This was the opportunity she needed to get the attention of the castle away from that scaled disgrace and back onto herself.

Back in the forge, Hiccup finished hammering the small two pronged hook he'd formed onto the shoulder guard. He plunged the combined pieces of metal into the cooling bucket and looked up at Toothless nestled comfortable in his hair. It was her second favorite spot to roost, after his shoulder, and he didn't really mind as long as she kept her claws away from his hair. "Well, shall we see how it did?" She trilled and flew off, landing on the horn of the anvil. He pulled the piece out of the cooling bucket, laid it on the flat part of the anvil, and pulled on one of the prongs. It held. "Yes!"

She roared in triumph, hopping on the anvil. "Let's put it together and try it out!" He slipped the leather straps into their brackets and cinched them tight around his chest and upper arm. With a deft hand, he slid the leather upper arm guard from his suit of practice armor up his arm and slipped the loops he'd added to the top over the new hooks on the metal shoulder guard. Toothless flew to where Hiccup had left the hawking glove from earlier and brought it over to him. "Thank you, Milady," he joked and accepted the leather, inserting his hand into the article and tying it to the leather arm guard on either side of his elbow.

He moved his arm around, testing all the different angles of both shoulder and elbow. The piece moved with him rather well. When he

stopped testing the range of motion and held it out straight, Toothless jumped on the upper arm guard and looked at him expectantly. "Don't feel a thing." She tightened her grip.

He laughed. "Still don't feel it."

She unsheathed her claws and dug in. He flinched. "Okay, maybe I feel that." She snorted and drew her claws back in, taking off and landing on the metal shoulder guard.

He looked at her, waiting for the verdict. Would she get off? Did the metal hurt her feet? But to his relief, she let out a happy trill and nuzzled his cheek. "Good, I'm glad you like it."

He was about to remove it to adjust the shape of the shoulder guard for a better fit when one of the guards came into the small forge. Bowing, the man said, "His Majesty would like to see you and Princess Milady in the throne room right away."

He flinched. This couldn't be good, but he followed the guard back to the main part of the castle anyway, still with Toothless perched on his shoulder.

****A cliffhanger, but nothing too horrible. And the names I used for the armor are real pieces, look them up. Did you like his design?****

****Please review! The first five reviews will earn another chapter!****

9. Into the Woods

Hiccup stormed into his room with the shoulder armor clanking and Toothless fluttering anxiously behind him. "I can't believe this! Is he looking for ways to humiliate me?!" She cooed soothingly, but her husband didn't notice. "It's always like this! He sets up tasks for the three of us that Hubert and Hamish can do just fine but I can't possibly complete. And then when I fail, he gives me that disappointed scowl, like someone skimped on the meat in his sandwich."

He threw his shoulders back and deepened his voice mockingly. "Excuse me cook, I'm afraid you brought me the wrong son. I ordered an extra-large prince with archery skills, a pretty wife and leadership skills on the side. This here, this isn't fit to be a stable boy!" He collapsed out of the persona and into one of the chairs sitting at the table, still pulled out from breakfast this morning, unmoving and exhausted.

She hopped from floor to chair to table until she was sitting on one of his knees. She warbled plaintively at him and he moved his hand away from his face so she could see those pretty green eyes of his. He sighed and reached out to stroke her gently. "I'm sorry, I'm justâ€¦frustrated. I mean, what can you possibly cook? You're a dragon!"

To his surprise, Toothless growled at him and bit him softly on the unprotected hand. "Ow! What was that for?"

In answer, she flew over to his writing desk and grabbed a blank piece of paper with her gums, pulling it out to where she could draw on it. Hiccup sighed, got up from his chair and walked over to help her. Once he removed the inkwell from its place inside one of the cabinets and opened it for her, Milady dipped a claw in and began to draw.

If there was one thing Hiccup absolutely loved about his wife, it was her drawing ability. He watched as a fish dinner with wild greens, seasonal fruit, and goblets of what he guessed was water decorated the paper. Once the picture was finished, Toothless took a wing tip and gently turned his head towards the window with a view of the forest. Smiling, he scratched her under the chin in just the right spot, making her arch her back in pleasure. "Well, then let's go get some ingredients."

But before he could leave, Toothless chirped at him and flicked her tail in the direction of the wardrobe where various capes designed for her by the seamstresses were stowed away for further use. He opened the doors and she flew in, coming out with what looked like a piece of netting with two strings at the top, which Hiccup guessed were supposed to be tied around her neck. She flew back out and dumped it in his hands, trilling happily. He shrugged. Okay, I guess we're taking this with us." He then borrowed several baskets from the kitchens, a wheelbarrow from the toolshed, and wheeled it all into the woods with Toothless riding in front.

Sophia and Clarice watched them leave with a smirk. Whatever those two came up with couldn't possibly compete with the creations of two highly educated ladies. They flounced down to the kitchens and began to issue orders to the already harried serving maids and cooks.

In the forest, Toothless led Hiccup to where a stream temporarily split around an island that grew several small bushes, which also covered the closest bank. She then pulled the piece of fabric out of one of the baskets and trilled at him expectantly. He looked from the river to the fabric, then back at the river, and exclaimed, "Aha!" He tied a few rocks in the bottom of the piece and fastened one end of the string at the top to a bush growing on the very edge of the shore. With a loop securely tied in the other end, Toothless flew over the river with the string in her mouth and looped it over one of the bushes. An impromptu fishing net in less than five minutes.

Toothless flew back and landed on his still armored shoulder and he smiled at her. "Not bad, Milady." She nipped his ear playfully and flew off again, chirping. He grabbed the handles of the barrow and followed the streak of dull green. When he finally caught up with her, he was standing in the middle of a meadow. Greener than the forest, he looked down and spotted a leaf that looked exactly like a "Dandelion greens," he commented to his wife who'd landed beside him. He laughed. "You know the best spots for everything, don't you?" She warbled and bobbed her head in answer. He laughed at her attempt at nodding and started to pick the greens.

They spent most of the afternoon wheeling their load through the forest while Toothless led him to different meadows, glades, fruit trees and berry bushes. Picking, gathering, and in some cases climbing, Hiccup soon filled all but the biggest basket with the fruits of the forest, with Toothless helping where she could. The

best part of the day was when they found a wild strawberry patch, although getting there was a bit painful. It started when Hiccup reached into a blackberry bush for a huge cluster of black fruits when a thorn caught him on the tender underside of his upper arm. "Ow." He carefully slid the appendage out of the bush and brought up the arm for inspection. A shallow cut crossed his forearm, long enough to be troublesome.

The minute he stepped back from the offending plant, Toothless started fluttering around him, warbling and whistling in concern. He showed her his arm. "Don't worry, it's fairly shallow." But she still dragged him back to a portion of the river upstream from where they'd planted the net and watched him to make sure he washed the wound clean. He finished and held it up for her opinion. "Clean enough, Milady?" She scowled, quite a feat for a dragon, and took his tunic between her gums. Pulling suddenly, she tore off a strip. He looked at her crossly. "Toothless, you can't just..oh," he finished when she offered the strip to him.

He bound it around the cut and she trilled happily, making him smile. She took such good care of him, a welcome change from the tough love of his brothers and father. Was this what it was like to have a woman in your life? He looked back down at her and noticed a spot of red at her feet. "Toothless, look! Strawberries!" They spent the next ten minutes plundering the patch and the ones nearby on the bank.

When the sun stood at half mast, marking the time they needed to start heading back to the castle to finish the preparations, the duo returned to the river to find their net filled with fish of different sizes. He looked at the fish caught in the netting. "Now how do we get the big ones out of the water and still let the little ones live?" In answer, Toothless dived down into the stream. Thinking she might hurt herself, Hiccup rushed to the edge of the bank and, to his slight astonishment, saw Toothless help several smaller fish through the net where they were tangled until only the ones big enough to eat were left. She emerged and Hiccup pulled the net out of the water, all the while heaping praise on his "Resourceful, smart, amazing" bride. A good thwack to the head and cut to a major artery later for each, the fish were thrown into the largest basket to be taken home with the rest of their goods.

****What did you think of the detail on this chapter? In the original story, the frog princess did everything herself, but I didn't want these two to be like that, at least not the first time. What did you think? If you get the reference from the title, I'll give you an internet cookie ;).****

****I saw Winter Soldier yesterday and thanks for some fantastic fanart on Deviantart, am already writing another crossover for Htttyd and Rotg with that storyline. Would anyone be interested in reading it?*****

****Please review.****

10. Dancing and Dreaming

Hiccup wheeled their stash through the courtyard to the staircase that led down to the kitchen. He'd hoped to ask for permission to use the fireplace for roasting the fish and a few of the apples, but he

stopped right outside the door when he heard a shrill voice saying, "No, that's nowhere near thin enough! Roll it out some more." He slowly inched his face past the doorframe and caught sight of his two sisters-in-law ordering the staff around. The forge suddenly seemed like a much better cooking spot.

He snuck back up to the courtyard where Toothless waited with the barrow. "Sorry, Toothless, looks like we're cooking in the forge instead." She made no comment other than leaping off the barrow and flying in the direction of the small building where the couple had spent most of their time recently. Leaving the barrow outside the door, Hiccup lugged the basket of fish inside and looked around for something to cut them with.

Toothless snorted and picked up a fish, carrying it through the air and over to one of the workbenches. She set it down on the wooden surface and sliced it open with a quick paw swipe before turning and giving a look that had "Did you forget who you're with?" written all over it. Hiccup laughed and brought over the rest of the fish for her to start preparing. While she finished slicing them open and removing the offal, he breathed some life back into the fire with the bellows and picked out a few slim iron rods. The fish were soon spitted and roasting over the hot coals.

The workbench was wiped clean with a rag kept in the room for that purpose. Hiccup like keeping his workspace clean, said it helped keep the metals pure. The various greens they'd gathered were tipped out of their basket and onto the desk, where Toothless began slicing with all four claws. Hiccup watched her as she danced around the leaves and suddenly started whistling an old tune his father liked to sing when he was sad, probably thinking about the boys' mother. Toothless stepped in time with the tune, as did Hiccup as he rotated between the bellows and checking the fish. They ended up singing it together as Hiccup washed the fruit in the barrel of rainwater just outside the door and Toothless nudged them into place on a platter the prince had finished for the kitchens a few days ago but hadn't found the time to return.

By the time he was through the second verse, the fruit was done, but he didn't stop whistling. Toothless grabbed his left hand between her paws and pulled him further outside, still chirping along. Flapping strongly, she flew in a circle, spinning Hiccup by the hand. He caught on to what she was trying and did the same, running around her as she hovered in the air. He decided to sing the last lines out loud. "I'll swim and sail on savage seas, with nary a fear of drowning, and gladly ride the waves of life if you will marry me!" As the tempo got faster and faster, he took Toothless by both paws and spun both of them in a circle as she trilled at the top of her lungs. He held out the last note for as long as his breath would let him, but had to stop spinning and get his breath back when the world went sideways. Toothless attempted to fly towards him again, but she was so dizzy from the spinning that she crash landed into his chest instead of on his shoulder, where she'd been aiming. But he just laughed and smiled at her. "So you cook and dance." She trilled up at him and nuzzled deeper into his chest. The pair walked back into the forge to check on the fish, Milady still in Hiccup's arms.

They arrived just in time to keep the meat from burning. Quickly, Hiccup grabbed the tongs and pulled the rods out of the fire, setting the still hot fish down on the clean anvil. Giving the forge a quick

look, Hiccup realized that they had a problem. The fish and greens also had to be served but they only had the one platter, and that was already under a mountain of fruit. He looked over at Toothless. "This is probably pretty stupid." She let out a series of warbles that sounded a lot like a laugh. "Okay, maybe it's crazy." They headed back towards the kitchens.

The two sneaked down the stairs to the kitchen again, keeping close to the wall and trying not to let the stairs or his prosthetic squeak. Both slid their heads around the corner and immediately pulled back into the safety of the shadows to laugh. Sophia was trying to hit a maid over the head with a rolling pin and Clarice was covered in egg! What had those two been trying to do?

There was a clunk of wood against bone and Hiccup leapt out of the shadows. "Stop, what are you doing?" He glared at Sophia, rolling pin still in hand.

"Teaching this girl a lesson about following orders," replied the princess as she raised the wooden weapon higher. Toothless flew out of the door, grabbed the other end, and pulled it right out of the woman's hand.

She threw it to Hiccup and he caught it. "You teach with words and rewards. Beatings are for animals." He glowered at her. "Get out of here."

She glared at him, but when she saw the head cook standing behind the boy, armed with a frying pan, she turned up her nose at the lot of them and slunk back upstairs. "I was finished here anyway. Clarice, come along. We have to get you clean before dinner." The egged princess soon followed and the kitchen breathed in relief.

Hiccup handed the rolling pin back to the head cook. "I'm sorry about them. I'll talk to my brothers about it."

She reached out and patted the boy's unarmed shoulder. "It's fine, Prince Hiccup. Was there something you needed?"

He looked up sheepishly and asked, "Can I have a platter and serving bowl?" The items were dumped into his arms almost before he finished the sentence.

He walked out of the kitchen and back up the stairs. Toothless was about to follow when the head cook turned to her and said, "He's a good boy. Watch out for him." The dragon roared in promise and followed her husband back to the forge to finish arranging dinner. They only had fifteen minutes before the king expected to be served.

***"For the Dancing and the Dreaming" was one of my favorite parts of the movie. I had to include it. My thanks to Shadowpiratemonkey7 for letting me use one of her pictures as cover art. I adjusted it a little, but most of it's all theirs.**

**In regards to chapter size, I know many of you wanted longer ones, but this is my way of pushing myself. I have to at least write a thousand words, and sometimes that makes me insert things that push the story forward and add depth. If I increased my standard, they might become wordy and lag. I try to make up for it by posting every

day.**

Thanks to all the lovely people who reviewed yesterday!

11. Dinner

With one minute to spare the pair ran to the entrance to the dining hall with their platters, but the head waiter grabbed him just as he went to put down one of the platters so he could open the door. "Wait, Your Highness. The king asked the other princesses to bring in their meals first. The other princes are already waiting inside."

"But," the prince stammered, "I have to help Toothless take the things in. She-"

"Will have help, sire," assured the head waiter. "Now go join your family inside and wait for us to deliver the goods."

He handed the platters of fruit and fish to the man and went down the corridor to a side door and entered the room where his father and brothers waited. "He finally shows!" teased Hamish. "We thought for sure you ran."

"What, who, me? No come on, she's way too good of a cook for that." The other royals laughed, thinking he was being his usual sarcastic self.

Hiccup took his seat one chair down from Hubert and Stoick called for Clarice to bring in her dishes. She and three servants entered the room, each laden with a platter. Huge baguettes, a swan with the feathers still attached, and a marzipan castle were laid in front of the king. The princess seated herself, smug in her victory.

Stoick reached for a baguette and tore it open. Or rather, he tried to. But the bread was as hard as a rock. He bit into an end, but could not tear a piece off with his teeth. Tossing it aside to Hubert, he reached for the beautiful swan. Blood flowed out of the bird with the first cut, marking it as unhealthily undercooked. Stoick pushed away the platter holding the bird, walked around the table, and broke a spire off the dessert castle. In seconds, it was spat out and Stoick shouted at his first daughter-in-law, "You call this a meal? This is not fit for servants! Throw the bread and that disgustingly sweet attempt at dessert to the hogs and the bird to the hawks!" The princess just sat there and took the abuse. She'd tasted the marzipan, measured the heat of the finished bird, and squeezed the bread to make sure it was soft. Toothless smirked outside in the hall. Looks weren't everything, in women or food.

After a few moments to let the king calm himself and for Clarice to gain some composure, the second princess entered, the three servants following her with covered trays. She set the first one in front of Clarice and opened the lid to reveal a collapsed bread wreath covered in mold. Quickly, she replaced the cover and whisked the embarrassment out of the room. What had happened? She'd checked the bread just outside in the hall.

Oh well, at least she had the next two dishes. The next one was set down in front of her husband, and the covering lifted to

revealâ€|ribs crawling with maggots and stinking to high heaven. The cover was immediately put back over the dish and she shooed the servant out of the room, stomach still flipping from the sight. If not for the fact that she'd checked it herself, she would have accused the servants of sabotage. It was a good thing her masterpiece was still fine. She took the platter herself and set it in front of the king. This platter contained a chocolate sculpture of his thrown, decorated with candied fruit for jewels. She removed the dome of steel to revealâ€|nothing.

Stoick leapt out of his chair and knocked the empty platter out of her hands, sending it flying across the room. It clanged against the stone wall. "Is this some sort of joke? Serving the royal family food that is either underprepared or rotten? Are the two of you trying to make us all sick?" The princesses cowered beneath his gaze.

Hiccup got up out of his chair and walked over to his father, placing a calming hand on the big man's wrist. "Milady still has her meal, Dad."

The king's face returned to its normal complexion as he looked at his son. "Then have her bring it in. Hopefully we'll actually get to eat something tonight."

Hiccup smiled and called out, "We're ready!" The doors opened and Toothless rode in on a trolley, full of the food they'd prepared and pushed by the head cook herself. Hiccup got up and placed the platter of fish decorated with the salmonberries they'd picked earlier in front of his father. The man levered a carcass off the platter and onto his plate, where he dissected it with a knife. The flesh was white and flaky, perfectly cooked.

Then Toothless grabbed the handles of the serving bowl and lowered the fresh salad onto the table. Hubert grabbed the tongs and moved some of the leaves to his plate. Putting one in his mouth, he let the fresh flavor tantalize every corner of his mouth. The cooks had put a little lemon juice in the leaves to better bring out the flavor, and it certainly showed on the prince's face. Hiccup introduced the fruit platter to his other brother, a mountain of blackberries, strawberries, and even a few apples in the center. Hamish spooned several blackberries into his mouth and let the flavor spill over his tongue, tart and sweet. Then his eyebrows drew together. "Why does this taste coppery?"

Hiccup flinched. "Sorry. I cut myself while I helped Toothless picked them. Some blood must have gotten on the berries; although I was sure I washed those. Here, try some of the strawberries instead."

Stoick smiled and dug into the fish on his plate. "You are a good husband to help your wife when she needs it, Hiccup. And thank you Milady, for a wonderful dinner." He scratched the dragon under her chin and the little lady arched her back in pleasure. They sat down to enjoy the meal, Hubert and Hamish asking many questions about where the ingredients had come from. Needless to say, they were surprised to find out that such bounty was in their own backyard. Hiccup promised to show them the spots he and Toothless had used, asking her permission first, of course.

Sophia and Clarice were fuming. They spent all day getting the kitchen to prepare those dishes to their exact specifications. How

could a dragon upstage them with food she found in the woods and probably cooked over a campfire? They were going to find a way to get back at her for this.

****Yes, Toothless had a hand in destroying the other two dinners. I have a new community up and running, so if you want to check it out and perhaps suggest stories for it, I would be so very grateful. Also feel free to vote on my new poll.****

****Please Review!****

12. Gifts

Clang!

Hiccup looked up from the magnifying glass he held the tiny brooch under and saw his eldest brother leaning against the workbench near the door, the shield he'd knocked off the wall at his feet. A shrill "Hubert, get out here!" penetrated the concentrated silence from the courtyard and the youngest prince suddenly had a very good idea about what had happened.

He gestured to the underside of the workbench. "I won't tell her you're here." Hubert smiled at his younger brother and slid under the bench, pulling the shield he'd knocked off the wall over the open end to shield him from sight. Clarice stormed in, glowered at Hiccup, took one look around, and stormed back out. A few moments later, Hiccup sounded the all clear and his brother emerged from behind the shield. "What was it this time?"

Hubert walked over and looked at what his younger and happier brother was working on. "She wanted me to investigate the kitchens. What are you working on?"

Hiccup snorted. "She's still mad about what happened two months ago? And it's a pin with our crest for Toothless. Our four month anniversary is tomorrow."

The man held out a callused hand. "Can I see it?"

"Sure." Hiccup picked up the tiny piece of jewelry and dropped it into his brother's palm.

Hubert held the piece up to his eye. "How did you get all these details in? It's so much smaller than the ones you made me and Hamish."

The youngest prince picked the pin back out of his hands and slipped the magnifying glass into it. "Take a look."

Hubert did, and gasped at the improved vision. "That's amazing!" He offered the instrument back to Hiccup and sat down next to him on the bench. "So how're you gonna give it to her?"

The teen blushed slightly. "I'm taking her back into the woods. There's this meadow full of wildflowers. I was planning to get a packed lunch from the kitchens and take Toothless out for the day. She doesn't like being inside all the time."

"So where is she today?" Hubert teased, elbowing his little brother.

Hiccup whacked him gently on the arm with a small hammer. "I'm making my preparations, she's making hers. Are you going to celebrate with Clarice?"

"You've got to be joking," he replied, horrified at the very idea. "I'm not spending a moment more than I have to around that harpy. I'd almost trade her in for a dragon at this point."

"HUBERT!" The shrill voice was even more insistent this time.

Hiccup shoved his brother off the bench. "Go out there before she tears apart my poor ears. I don't need that in here."

His older brother left reluctantly, and Hiccup screwed the magnifying glass back into its holder, placed the pin back under the lens, and returned to chiseling the fine details of the lion's mane into the gold.

Back in their shared chambers, Toothless bounced around on the bottom of her wardrobe, knocking aside the different sets of cuffs and capes the seamstresses made for her. Really, why did they bother making things she never wore? Dressing up as a dragon was just humiliating, especially since she already had a fabulous green coating. She stomped hard at the absurdity of it and knocked loose one of the floor boards.

Finally! She pounced on the small cubbyhole the board had hidden and clutched its contents in a claw. Carefully, she drew out the small pendant she'd been working on for her husband. It was one of her scales with a hole bored in the top from one of her claws and threaded on a string of leather she'd combed the forge for, a leftover from when Hiccup was cutting the laces for his arm guard. She put the string in her mouth and flew it out of the wardrobe and right into a startled Mark's face.

She squeaked in surprise, and the action opened her mouth and released the necklace, but Mark caught the string on the tip of his finger. "Sorry about that, Milady," he apologized to the now perched Toothless. "I just thought you'd be with Hiccup. What were you doing in there?" She flew up and took the scale pendant from him. "Oh. Right." Then he looked again. "Is that for Hiccup, by any chance?"

The skin between her scales turned a vivid green. Mark's face lit up. "It is, isn't it? Oh, that is so sweet of you. But," she looked up at the teasing tone, "I think you can do a bit better than some leather." He reached into the wardrobe and grabbed one of the silk ball dresses. "Why not put it on some of this?" He proffered the dress.

The little dragon let out an excited trill and grabbed the piece of fabric, quickly detaching a small strip with her claws. She grabbed the end and tried to force it through the hole, but silk was flimsier than leather, and the end refused to fit through the pendant. "Here," offered Mark. "Let me help." He wetted the end of the strip in his mouth. As he lined up the end of the strip, Toothless flapped down onto his arm and watched as he lined up the silk and scale. A poke

later, the silk was sticking out the other end.

Toothless grabbed the other end and pulled the silk through the hole so that half the strip hung from either side of the pendant. Mark tied together the ends and handed the new necklace to the scaly princess. "Your gift, Milady." Toothless snorted at him and flew to the top of the bed, present firmly clutched in her talons. Mark laughed at the sight and went back to his cleaning.

That night, gifts safely hidden, Toothless was woken when Hiccup's side crashed into her wing as he rolled from side to side in their bed, hands grasping at something below the covers. She leapt out of the bed and flew around the chamber, roaring for help. Mark burst in from the servant's room across the hall and immediately took stock of the situation. "Get the blankets off him!" he yelled to the panicking princess and began pulling at one corner of the sheets wrapped around the teen. She grabbed the other corner and began pulling with everything she had, wings and all. But those blankets were wrapped tight. How long had he been thrashing before he woke her?

Finally, Mark and Toothless gave up on the blankets. "Okay. Toothless?" She chirped in attention. "Can you wake him up?" She warbled at him, confused. "He's having phantom pains again. We have to wake him up so he can ride it out without hurting himself." She nodded and dove for the rolling figure. She tried to coo in his ear and got hit on the nose for her troubles. Swats with a tail or leg missed. Finally, she grabbed both sides of his head with her forepaws and head-butted him.

He woke with a shout. "Ah, it hurts!"

Toothless roared to get his attention and Mark yelled, "Open your eyes, Hiccup!"

But they stayed shut tight. "It hurts!"

Mark took another look at his friend and decided it was too much for him to handle. He bolted out of the door in the direction of the physician. The minute he left, Toothless pulled off the green dragon skin, grabbed Hiccup by both shoulders, and shouted, "Look at me!" The sound of a new voice startled him into doing just that. "Now you are going to listen and do what I tell you. Let go of your leg."

Tears fell from his cheeks. "But it hurts."

"I know, love," she whispered soothingly, "But you have to let go of it. Grab my hands instead." She held out her hands, covered now in human skin and with long tapered fingers. Hiccup slowly relinquished the death grip he had his stump in and wound his fingers on one hand into hers, using the other to support himself. She smiled at him. "Good. Now keep holding on and I'll get us both back under the warm covers. We'll ride this out." She untangled the covers from his sweaty, pain-wracked body and slid her own beneath them, letting Hiccup wrap his arms around her waist. "There, love. Is that better?"

He nodded. "I think the pain's starting to decrease."

"Good." She kissed the top of his forehead. "Now just keep holding

onto me until it's gone." She started humming the song he'd taught her the day after the dinner competition, the one they'd danced to that night outside the forge. He was asleep in seconds.

Toothless would have loved to stay in the bed with him, but no one could find her like this. Not yet. She slid out into the night air and folded herself back into the green dragonskin. Again a beast, she wiggled her way into the bed and slid her paw into Hiccup's curled fingers. When Mark came in with the healer, both marveled at how the little dragon had quieted a pain that would usually have taken hours to die down enough to let the boy sleep.

****Aha! Our first hint that Toothless may be more than she seems. What did you think?****

****Please Review!****

13. Why,Dad?

Hiccup woke the next morning. He had the strangest dream of a woman helping him through the pain last night. He flinched at the memory. That had been the worst episode in a while, certainly since he'd married Toothless. He looked at the little dragon nestled into him with fondness. He hadn't thought he'd actually be happy with the arrangement, and here they were, about to go celebrate their four month anniversary together. Stroking one of her ears, he gently woke the little lady.

She chirped at his sleepily. "Good morning to you too. We should get up if we want to make it to the glade." She nodded, but then snuggled down into the blankets. Hiccup laughed. "Come on." He whipped the blankets off her small body. She squeaked and tucked her tail in closer to her legs, glowering at him. He laughed, but bolted for the changing screen when she leapt out of the bed, intent on catching him and setting his hair alight. But just before he reached it, his good leg caught on a chair and he toppled to the floor.

Toothless ceased her teasing chase and dove for him, checking every inch of him with her paws, snout, and tail. When she reached his stomach, Hiccup's face screwed up and he bit back a laugh. Toothless pawed the area again and the chuckle escaped his lips. Toothless grinned and began running all over the spot, trying to avoid Hiccup's flailing hands as he laughed from her masterful tickling.

"To-" laugh "Toothless" wriggle "Stop, please!" another laugh. "Toothless!" But she refused to let up, dodging this way and that until he successfully rolled over and pinned her between him and the floor. He smirked at her. "My turn."

But to the great relief of the littlest princess, Mark chose that moment to appear with the breakfast tray. "Sire," Hiccup looked up from where he had Toothless pinned, not realizing how it would have looked had Toothless been human. "Your father would like to speak with you and Milady after breakfast." He then skedaddled, not wanting any more information on the quirks of the prince's love life.

Hiccup reluctantly let Toothless wiggle out from underneath him and the two attacked the breakfast tray. Fifteen minutes later, both stood with the other royals in the throne room, sated and dressed.

Stoick looked them over. "Sons, two months ago, I gave your wives the chance to prove themselves worthy of their marriage to you. Only one succeeded." Hiccup winked at Toothless. "However, I will not base my opinion of your wives off one instance."

He looked at them all again, perhaps lingering on Sophia and Clarice. "I propose another challenge. This room needs a rug." He flung his arms out to encompass the whole of the throne room. "This time next week, I want each of my daughters in law to bring me a rug to cover the floor of this chamber. You are dismissed." Hubert and Hamish led their wives out of the room to discuss possible plans. Toothless flew up to the king and nipped him affectionately on the ear as a sign of goodbye and turned aroundâ€¦|

To find Hiccup gone. Frantic, she raced through the corridors, checking their rooms, the servant's quarters, the library, the kitchens, anywhere he might be. But all of them were empty. Geoffrey, the head cook, Mark, no one knew where he was. Toothless sat down by a window to think. She needed to talk about this new challenge with him, or at least try to. But how was she supposed to do that when she couldn'tâ€¦|

A clanging sound echoed in from out in the courtyard. Of course. She flew out through the window and into the forge where her husband smashed the hammer down on a steel rod. Again and again he brought the hammer down, flattening the poor piece of iron until it was as useless as, well, him. Why did his father do this to him? Toothless had already proven her worth. She'd out-cooked two human brides and made him much happier than he would have been otherwise. Why was that not enough for Dad? The hammer stroke missed the flattened rod and caught him on the hand. "Ah!" He threw both pieces to the side and clutched at his hand. He wondered if the fingers were broken. Then they'd match him.

He heard a whine and looked up into a pair of huge green eyes. He sighed. "Sorry, Toothless. I'm just frustrated. Let's go back into the room. We have to think of something." She butted her head gently against his chest and flattened her paws against him. Obeying her silent command, he picked her up and took her back to the room. He didn't think they'd be going out today, not with the new ton of bricks dropped on their shoulders.

Hiccup walked to where the seamstresses were housed to ask for help with the rug, but when he arrived, Clarice was already there, ordering the assistants around like she owned the place. A quick retreat seemed the best course of action. Next, he tried the town market. With all the iron trinket trading he did, most of the dealers knew him. But his way was barred when Sophia and her entourage swept through the street, bullying the poor venders. Okay, buying wasn't an option. The two spent the rest of the day checking their options, but either one of the princesses had been there first or they wouldn't be able to get a fine enough rug ready during the allotted time.

The prince trudged back up to the castle gate. "How're we gonna do this Toothless?" he moaned to his wife as she flew level with his shoulder. "The food was one thing. Cooking's not that hard, as long as you don't try anything fancy, but neither of us can weave! It's almost like he wants you to fail." He sat down in the grass and buried his head in his hands. "And today was supposed to be special. She wriggled through his arms and sat herself in his lap, reaching

up. Gently, she put her paws on his chest and stretched up her neck until the tip of her snout rested against his nose. He smiled and closed his eyes, leaning forward so she didn't have to stretch so far. How long they sat like that, Hiccup didn't know. He just knew that, when he got back up and again headed for the castle, he felt a bit better. The rug situation was still hopeless, but Toothless was not. And hopefully, neither was he.

****Kind of a boring transitional piece, so I'll make you a deal. Five reviews today and I'll upload the next chapter, which is much sweeter.****

14. Hopeless Romantics

****Congratulations for rising to my challenge and earning another chapter! More at the end.****

Tired and still mildly frustrated, Hiccup pushed open the doors to his room, and just stared. Someone had completely transformed the room.

The table he usually used as a desk was no longer covered in papers. Instead a fine linen tablecloth edged in lace covered the surface. Cast iron candlesticks rested on either side of a huge bouquet of wildflowers, white candles standing elegant and still unlit. Two places were set with fine dishes and goblets, silverware and napkins, and beside each plate was a small box.

Mark stepped out of the shadows. "We heard what happened this morning, with the king and the rug competition, but we didn't want it to spoil your anniversary." The cook also stepped forward balancing two small platters. "Do you like it?"

Hiccup let a smile split open his tired expression. "We'll tell you after dinner." Mark laughed and took the trays from the cook, transferring the deliciously seasoned fish onto the plates and adding a few other dishes to Hiccup's plate.

He lit the two candles and receded from view. "Call us when you're ready for dessert."

Hiccup smiled at his friend. As much as Mark liked to tease, the boy did have a few kind bones in him. The prince pulled out a chair for Toothless and she fluttered down into it from her position beside him. After he took his own seat across from her, both dug into the meal, frequently exclaiming over the delicious food. After the fish was about half finished, Hiccup sat back and noticed the box beside his napkin for the first time. Funny, he'd been keeping his gift for Toothless in one just like it. Was itâ€¦

Hiccup cracked open the lid and peaked inside. There sat the gold pin on a bed of fabric fragments. Well, no time like the present. He picked up the small box, stood up out of his chair and walked over to Toothless' side of the table. "Happy anniversary," and set the box down on the side of her plate that wasn't already occupied.

He held his breath as she knocked off the lid with a wing tip and examined the tiny pin. _Why did I have to make her a pin? Where's she going to put it? I should have gotten her a necklace. But that would

have gotten tangled with her wedding one! I should have-- the sensation of scales against his cheek pulled him from his mind and he looked down. Toothless was kissing him. He blushed bright red and froze where he stood until Toothless did something that sounded far too much like a laugh for his liking. The sound jolted him out of the love-struck daze and he unclasped the pin, winding it through the links on her marriage chain so that it hung beside the ring.

She picked up the unopened box that rested on the other side of her plate with both front paws. Hiccup realized what it was a moment later when she held it out to him. "Really, you got me something? Well, that's, uh--" she made that amused snort -- "or was it a huff mixed with a small roar?-- as he took the box with a sheepish expression and opened it, setting the lid on the table. A beautiful green scale was strung on a bit of blue silk. "Toothless, I--" She flapped up from her chair, sending the candle flames dancing. She reached into the box, picked up the loop in her moth, and dropped it on top of his head.

Hiccup laughed at the bit of jewelry dangling over his nose as Toothless landed back in her seat. He untied the string and retied it behind his head so the silk encircled his neck, letting the beautiful pendent rest just below the hollow of his throat. "Thank you, Toothless." He laid a gentle kiss on her cheek, just as she had done and returned to his seat to finish the meal.

When they finished with the fish, Mark came forward and removed their plates, replacing them with two small ones and a platter of chocolate covered strawberries. But these were not the sorts of treats children make for some fun. These delicacies were covered in rich milk chocolate with white and dark chocolate drizzled over the top in elaborate swirls and patterns. The green tops had been removed for ease, and the firelight glistened off the candied tops, as pink as, well, strawberries. Hiccup eagerly grabbed one and was about to put it in his mouth when he got an idea.

He reached over the table and offered the berry to Toothless. Instead of taking it and putting it on her plate, she extended her neck forward and bit right into it. Hiccup laughed. "That works." Toothless seemed to think so too, because she hopped onto the table, grabbed a berry between her paws, and held it up to Hiccup. He leaned down and took a bite out of the offering. Then he decided to have a little fun. He took another bite, and this time, he just nipped the tips of her toes.

Toothless pulled back, chirping in both surprise and delight. Hiccup laughed at the movement and held out a chocolate confection. Toothless returned the favor and somehow fit the whole thing in her mouth at once, nipping at his fingers with her little gums. They finished the whole platter that way, teasing, biting, and generally having a splendid time. Mark removed the tray as the two got ready for bed, Hiccup changing into his night shirt and Toothless working the chain off her head. Soon the couple was fast asleep and those watching headed for their own rooms and blankets.

Toothless rose out of the bed, leaving her green dragon skin in between the sheets. She crossed the room in two strides and opened the door to her wardrobe, searching again for the loose floor board. Within minutes she'd popped it out and retrieved a black dragon skin from the small compartment. She opened the largest window in the

room, something bigger than most people's doors, and wrapped herself in the black leather. Her ear plates twitched as she checked the magnificent wings and tail, ensuring that everything from her green eyes to her tail fins was in order. With a look over her shoulder at her sleeping husband, she dove into the night, determined to solve their rug problem in such a way that Stoick couldn't possibly find fault with either of them.

****Did anyone notice the friend I brought back for this chapter? I wrote this because I think it helps develop their relationship from a friendly sort of thing to something more romantic. Did it work? Don't worry, plot kicks into gear again next chapter.****

****Congratulations for earning this! I love being able to do this, because the fewer chapters I have in reserve, the more this pushes me to write. You also get to read more. And please, feel free to criticize and ask questions.****

15. Hunting

She leapt off the window ledge and melted into the night, her first and best refuge. The night had always hidden her, and that deal with the Red Death did not count. The beast's fire had made total darkness impossible. But tonight was moonless, cloudy, and perfect for hunting.

She swooped low over the forest and scented the air for her desired prey. Deer, rabbits, the ever present fish, a fox that might make a nice backup, and—oh. She unsheathed her fangs, much more impressive in this form. There it was, musky, mingling berries, honey, and meat. Such tasty prey and the fur was wonderfully thick and warm. But the scent was diluted, the prey far afield. Well, she wasn't the fastest of all dragons tonight for nothing. The air shrieked around her as a night fury shot through the sky to the east, following the smell of bear.

As she flew, Toothless thought about her life back in the castle with Hiccup. Of course, anything was better than what she'd been living, serving the Red Death like a pet or slave. Before that, it had been Father, watching, playing, hunting with her. They would soar through the sky on wings of their choosing and then land on two legs to sit by the fire and make up stories or just talk. It had been a freer time, with no servants waking her and no competitions that didn't even have halfway decent opponents. But there was Hiccup.

Hiccup. She'd meant to seduce him, having him eating out her hand. But that day, when she watched him from a tree in the forest, he'd tried so hard, and was too young to know lust intimately enough for it to dominate him. So she'd entered his life as a little thing, just a common dragon with an arrow in its mouth, not the great lady she'd been planning.

And she'd fallen in love with him, despite her objective to simply gain a place to hide while the time limit on the Red Death's chain magic wore off. But how could she not love the wit, the tender strokes down her wings, the way he talked to her as if she was intelligent enough to understand? Funny, Hiccup made her scales into skin, and the Red Death had objectified her. Perhaps that was another thing she loved about him.

And because she loved him, she would do this for him. The prey was close now, the scent much thicker in the air. She landed in one of the sturdier trees and took in the lay of the land. The scent wafted out of the cave, stunning her sensitive nose with its intensity. The creature must have been wet when it went to sleep. That stench was awful! Though, she really should have been thanking it, it had made the smell strong enough to track from the castle, which was now a good five miles away. The clearing at the foot of the cave made an ideal place to use to draw the animal out.

Well, she knew one thing that would wake it for sure. Letting the gas pool in her mouth, she unleashed a plasma blast just feet away from the cave mouth. The prey didn't disappoint. It barreled out of the cave and snarled, scanning its surroundings. It was mad, just about ready to rear up and slash those paws at the nearest thing that moved. Perfect.

Toothless flared her wings and roared for good measure. Whipping around to face her, the creature added its own roar to the din and charged. A quick sweep of her wings and she was out of the way. The beast charged again, faster this time. Again, she dodged, finally getting enough gas in her mouth. The plasma blast ignited the grass at the beast's foot, making it rear up from fright and anger.

That left his wide open. Toothless shot forward and raked her claws down his underbelly before shooting into the sky and out of range. The bear, angry and in substantial pain, ran through the brush and surrounding forest, looking for his foe. Toothless watched from the sky, keeping an eye on her dying prey. That wound was too huge for the beast to survive. It would bleed out soon enough.

A howl sounded through the sky. Apparently, she wasn't the only one hungry for bear tonight. She flew in a wide arc, trying to spot the competition. She hoped it wasn't a large group. A bear was one thing, but a pack of wolves? If it was more than twenty, she'd have to give up and hunt down the fox from earlier. It wouldn't make nearly as impressive a rug, but still a nice one.

But it looked like the fox was in luck. It was only eight wolves, and three were heavily pregnant. Perhaps the bear's cave doubled as a birthing den. They did seem to be headed there, and not for her quarry. The wolves entered the cave and she breathed a sigh of relief. The bear was quieting now, probably drawing his last breaths. She flew to a tree near him and watched as he collapsed.

After the twitching ceased, she pounced and turned him over. Her earlier cut had served the dual purpose of killing him and beginning the skinning process. She wished Hiccup was here to pat her on the wing for cleverness. She finished the first cut, and began the other two. Her claw made quick work of the bear and she soon had the skin rolled up and ready to take to Hiccup, head, tail, and paws intact. Then she looked back at the carcass. All that lovely meat was just going to go to waste, and since she wasn't particularly hungry—

The wolf males guarding the females heard a ruckus outside the cave mouth and came to investigate. The bear might be coming back for his home. And the bear had come back, just not in the way they'd expected. Toothless watched the wolves check for threats before

dragging the carcass into the cave for themselves and the females. She thanked every star she knew that Hiccup never did that for her. Chocolate covered strawberries were much more his style.

****This is my first Toothless-centric chapter. A little of her history, feelings about her marriage, and her capabilities as a big dragon. Do you think Stoick will like the rug she's making him?****

****Please Review!****

16. The Rugs

King Stoick ruled over the court from his throne. Today was the day the other two brides would hopefully prove themselves. After that disastrous cooking competition a few months ago, they needed a boost for public opinion. Noblemen, merchants, and even a few foreign dignitaries lined the walls, waiting for the three princesses.

The three princes stood in a row slightly behind their father's throne. Hubert and Hamish, to be honest, were bored by the whole thing. Why wouldn't they be? Their wives had given them absolutely no say in how things went today. Hiccup walked up to his father. "You know Dad, you don't have to do this."

"Yes, son, I do." And not just for the sake of the kingdom. He really did need a rug for this room. Stone was right uncomfortable.

"No, you don't. Listen, why don't we have the presentations later, without this huge crowd? What if one of them embarrasses herself? It wouldn't look very good."

"I trust my daughters-in-law to do their very best, Hiccup." He turned and smiled at his son. The boy really did care for their whole family. "Now go back and stand with your brothers."

Abandoning his quest to save Toothless, he trudged back to his place and clenched his hands in the hem of his tunic. This was different from before. Before, Toothless had let him help, but he hadn't even seen his wife for the past week. What had she been doing? Had she run from fear of what would happen if she failed?

No. She wouldn't do that to him. The scale rubbed against his chest and he pulled it from beneath his shirt. Running his thumb over the smooth surface, he remembered the last night they'd had together before this whole thing started. She wouldn't have been as relaxed, as open with him that night if she'd been planning to run. He clenched his fist around the pendant. She would be here. And who knows, she might even pull off a decent rug.

The trumpets sounded and Clarice entered with a small bundle under her arm. With a flourish, she unrolled it and set it at the king's feet. It was a beautiful piece, with fine fringe at the edges and bright, rich colors in the geometric design. She looked up at His Majesty's face, hoping for approval.

But he scowled. "This is barely big enough to rest my boots on! Take it to some servant's room to lie before their undersized hearth. That's the only place it's big enough for!" She cringed, rolled the

rug back up and bolted out of the room. All those hours ordering the weavers for nothing.

Sophia caught a glimpse of the disgraced princess and smirked. You couldn't possibly make a rug big enough for a king in a week. Then the trumpet sounded a second time and she had the two servants carry in her rug. She too, unrolled the piece at the king's feet, waiting for the royal verdict. He put his feet down on the woolen surface and sighed before giving the design a closer look.

"It is a fine rug," he announced, and Hiccup's heart fell. "For a purchased one!" The yell yanked the prince's heart past his chest and into his throat. "I asked for a rug you made, not something you bought from a common merchant! Return the man's goods at once!" The servants bowed their heads and rolled the rug back up and removed it from the king's sight. It would later be taken down to the village and returned to the foreign salesman the princess had purchased it from.

The trumpet sounded the third time, and the four royals waited for the last of the ladies. But Gawain entered the hall instead. "Excuse me, Your Majesty, Your Highnesses," said the knight, bowing respectfully, "But I'm afraid Milady's rug is too big for her to carry and none of the servants will touch it."

"I'll go," the youngest prince volunteered. She was back! She hadn't run off after all! Almost running, he passed Gawain and barreled through the doors, but stopped when he saw Toothless perched on a dark brown bundle. He raced forward and gathered her in his arms, squeezing for all he was worth. She slung her limbs around his neck and squeezed too. She had missed him. Then he all but threw her back onto the bundle and wagged his finger in her face. "Bad dragon, very bad dragon! You scared me to death! Don't ever stay away that long again, and what are you sitting on?" She folded her ears, trying to keep out the shouting, even though she knew she deserved it, at least a little. And it was nice to know he cared enough to worry.

He was about to tear into her again when both looked at Gawain. The man was laughing, head thrown back with tears at the corners of his eyes. "I do believe that is the first time you've ever shouted at anyone! Bravo, lad." Hiccup had the grace to turn a little pink. "But, we do have a rug to deliver, so I suggest we save the lectures for later." Both men reached down and hooked their fingers under the package, Toothless pulling from the top. The trio got the package through the doors and up the aisle to the king's feet.

As Toothless began to unfold her bundle, Hiccup gasped. It was a huge bearskin, with thick brown fur and the head and paws still attached. When Toothless finished unfolding it, it covered more of the floor than Sophia's bought rug, had a color richer than any hue from Clarice's, and was softer than both. Once she finished straightening it out, the little dragon fluttered up to perch on his shoulder and warbled a question. He smiled at her. "It's beautiful Toothless." He stroked her favorite wing spot and she roared in triumph.

Stoick laid his feet down in the fur and sighed with relief. "This is a rug any man would be proud to own. And I am even prouder of the daughter who would grace my house so." To the astonishment of all present, he got up from his chair and walked over to his son and daughter-in-law. "Thank you, Toothless," he said as he patted her

scaly head.

In response, she flew up and perched on top of his head, trilling loudly and making the occupants of the hall laugh at the sight both absurd and adorable. With the main event of the afternoon over, the company began to mingle. Toothless and Hiccup slipped away from the crowd and back to their rooms, leaving the rug for everyone to admire.

Inside their shared chamber, Hiccup let Toothless hop onto the back of a chair and closed the doors behind him. Then he turned back around and the little lady cringed at the look on his face. She was in trouble. After fifteen minutes of lecturing about notes, keeping others from worrying, accepting help when you needed it, and generally keeping him in the loop, he let the volume down a tad. "Toothless, I thought you ran." She leapt forward to chastise him for doubting her faithfulness when she saw the tears in his eyes. "It was torture. Please don't do that to me again." She crooned softly and butted her head against his chest. He wound his arms around her again and just held her close.

She sank into his warmth and made up her mind about something. After the time limit on the Red Death's chain magic expired, she'd go back to her father to let him know she was alright. Then she would return here, to the boy who worried, cried and held her.

****I cannot believe the response for yesterday's chapter! Tat was amazing, guys! I loved reading all your comments. By the way, I had someone look over the first few chapters of the story, so chapters 1-5 have new details and fewer mistakes.****

****The quote in here is possibly my favorite from the whole franchise.****

17. Wake up

Hiccup woke the next morning, flat on his back with Toothless lying on top of him. "Good morning, Milady." She chirped at him and wiggled further up on his sheet covered torso. Then the covers shifted beneath her as Hiccup brought his knees up to his chest and sat up. Toothless squeaked as she slid down the much steeper incline before she planted her feet and looked up with reproachful eyes.

He sighed. "Well, as much as I would love to stay here with you all day, I am a prince and need to take care of my duties." Her eyes softened and she gently tapped his nose with the tip of her snout. He smiled under the touch, and both just sat there for a moment, eyes closed. Toothless blew in his face.

Hiccup recoiled. "Toothless!" She laughed and bounded off the bed. Hiccup threw his legs over the edge and reached for his prosthetic, slipping it on but not tightening the straps just yet. He limped behind the changing screen and got ready for the morning. Once he was finished, Toothless flew behind the screen with her marriage necklace dangling from her mouth. Hiccup grabbed it and refastened it around her neck.

He'd pretty much done that every morning since the day after the presentations of the rugs. The necklace had come unfastened during

the night and fell underneath the bed, they'd spent a good three hours looking for the little piece of jewelry before Toothless finally found it hiding under a corner of the coverlet. She dragged it out and showed it to Hiccup.

He bowed low, making her giggle, and she handed him the chain. Checking it for breaks, he muttered, "Looks okay. The clasp must have somehow come undone last night." He looked over at Toothless, perched on the bed and waiting for his reaction. "Maybe we should take off your necklace before bed, huh? No risk of it breaking or getting lost like this." She bobbed her head in approval and let him fasten it around her neck again, just like he'd done this morning and every morning in between.

After a substantial breakfast, Hiccup stretched in his chair. "Well let's see what we're fixing today." They headed out of the room and towards the forge; Toothless perched on top of Hiccup's head.

Hiccup banked up the fire with the bellows and Toothless sorted through the damaged items for something easy to get started with and came back to Hiccup with a fireplace poker in her claws. The battle between the maid and the burning log had become legend yesterday amongst the servants, but the resulting bent fire poker wound up in Hiccup's shop. As she flew towards him, Toothless noticed something. Hiccup was pumping the bellows with only one hand. Odd. He'd always used both.

Once the fire was at the proper temperature, although the heat from the fire didn't combine well with the summer sunshine from outside, Hiccup thrust the poker's bent end into the coals and waited for it to heat up sufficiently to work with. While the poker heated up, Hiccup joined his wife and sorted through the stack of bent, mangled, and generally misshapen. They sorted through the pieces together based on what temperatures were needed, what size the piece was, and the type of fixing that needed to be done.

Some pieces, like the poker, only needed to be heated up and bent back into shape. A few pieces had broken in half and would have to be soldered back together, a much more delicate operation than hammering away at something. Some needed to be added to, like the mirror waiting for a hook to hang by. After about five minutes, the poker was hot enough to work with. Hiccup removed his cloth tunic and tied the leather apron around his waist. He didn't want to scorch the sleeves or anything, and it was getting considerably hot in that room.

Toothless glanced in his direction and did a double take. What had happened to her Hiccup? Muscle rippled on his back as he lifted the hammer and brought it down on the piece of metal clenched in the tongs. His shoulder rotated as he brought up the hammer for another strike, almost losing the leather strap of the apron as the shoulder muscles bunched up around it. Toothless watched as he hammered the poker back into place and unknowingly put himself on display for the little dragon.

Then he turned around and smiled at her, and she suddenly remembered the sweet soul hiding behind that lean back. He held up the poker for inspection. "What do you think? An improvement?" She warbled her agreement and landed on his shoulder, rubbing her cheek against his sweatier one. "Yeah. I just wish someone could straighten me

out."

Anger crossed her face and she nipped his ear harder than usual. "Ow!" His hand flew to the bite mark. "Toothless, what was that for?" She growled at him and grabbed the string tie of the apron, using it to pull him toward the pile of things to be fixed. "Stop! What are you doing?" She let go and hunted down the mirror, gripping it as best she could and trying to get him to look in it. "Toothless, whatâ€¦" Then he saw what she did.

Hiccup grabbed the top of the mirror and inspected himself for a moment. He pressed a hand against his no longer skinny chest and noticed how the muscles on his arm moved under the skin. He looked at Toothless for encouragement and she bobbed her head. _Go on._

He flexed his arm and watched as the bicep grew taut. A finger pressed into the muscle and admired how firm it was. He looked back at his wife. "And all ofâ€¦this," he gestured at himself, "is like this?" She trilled again and flew around his head, landing on top of it.

A laugh bubbled up and he unleashed it on the world. Of course it would take a dragon to notice. Well, he was turning seventeen next month. About time he got some muscle. Hiccup went back to the forge with a frying pan that had taken one too many hits from some poor assistant's skull and Toothless giggled to herself as he flexed again when he thought she wasn't looking. But at least he now knew he was just as amazing as she was.

****Starting with mornings seems to be a habit for me. But I never let them wake up the same way twice! This morning contains the image from the cover. Who liked Toothless waking Hiccup up from his slight pity party about his looks?***

****The response yesterday was fantastic! Please continue to be so amazing with your comments.****

18. Daddy

That night, Toothless flitted from chair to table, to bed, back under the covers, and back out again, warbling quietly to herself. Really, it was a miracle she didn't wake the boy. But she felt that, if she did, he deserved it. It was his fault she couldn't get to sleep in the first place and was now doing the dragon equivalents of pacing and muttering. What was she supposed to get him for his seventeenth birthday, not to mention their anniversary?

There was very little she could do as a dragon that she hadn't already done. She couldn't hunt for him like a regular dragon, he didn't like meat and preferred to help her if she did want to hunt. He heard her singing and admired her flying daily, so those wouldn't be a treat. Scales were also out of the question. She'd given him that present the day before the rug ordeal.

She paused in her frenzied flying and sank into the memory of that day. Soft candlelight, delicious food, and the sort of sweet intimacy she'd only ever dreamed of. An intimacy that hadn't been likely when she and her father lived far from other settlements, due to their ability to use magic and their dual forms.

Wait! She lifted off her perch. That was it! She'd go ask father for his opinion on the problem! She slipped out of her green skin and hid it in the cubbyhole in the bottom of her wardrobe before opening the biggest window. She wrapped the night fury skin around her body and moments later soared through the opening, into the sky, and hopefully on her way to a solution.

The ocean bulged upwards before the swell of water ruptured and allowed the huge beast entrance to the air. The white behemoth breathed deeply before preparing to dive back down again. He looked up and admired the sky. Nowhere else could you get such a clear view, free of trees and manufactured light. Tracing the dipper with his eyes, he almost reached the end when something flashed across the last star. Could he have simply counted wrong? No, there it was again. Stars winked in and out of sight, outlined by a shape in the sky.

The swim forgotten, the bewilderbeast fixed its eyes on the sky, determined to identify this thing that blocked out the stars. If it was a threat, he would dive again and wait for daybreak. But then, and the patch crossed in front of a particularly dense group of stars, he caught the whole outline. He knew only one beast with such splendid wings.

Roaring a delighted greeting, the bewilderbeast kicked toward the shore, throwing the ocean around him into turmoil as his motion created waves that crashed into the beach. Once his head rested on the shore, the beast shrank and he climbed out from beneath the white cloak that enabled the transformation. Winding it around his waist, he looked back to the sky to locate the patch of dark, his daughter.

Instead, a figure ran out of the wooded coastline and crashed into him. "Daddy!"

He brought his strong arms around his daughter and held her in a gentle squeeze. "It's good to see you, my little night fury." He looked down at his greatest treasure bound up in her black skin. "How have you been, little lady?"

She smiled and looked up into his wrinkled but still strong face. "The plan worked. I escaped with the green skin you smuggled in with the sheep cart."

"And where are you staying? Are you safe there?" he asked as he brushed a lock of long dark hair back from her eyes.

She blushed and looked down. "That's actually why I came."

They retreated to their small house and she told him the story of how she realized that she needed someone to help slay the Red Death and free the others as well. But very few trusted magic users, especially those who could change form. So she'd found Hiccup and bonded them together, permanently. He balked at the thought of the marriage. "Daughter, do you realize what you've done?" His voice rising, he grabbed her by the shoulders. "This is not something you can undo. You've traded one master for another, and this one can't just be escaped from! You're his until one of you dies!"

She gently removed his hands from her person and looked up at him, smiling broadly. "But I don't want to escape from him. I love him, Daddy." She eased the somewhat shocked man into a chair and sat down facing him. "He's nothing like the Red Death, he's the opposite. He's sweet, he worries, he's gentle, he caresâ€¦Dad, I've only been a dragon around him but he treats me like a person."

"Can he protect you?" asked her father. "If the Red Death comes for youâ€¦"

"Then he and I can work something out. His mind is amazing. He can solve almost any problem you give him, as long as he has some hope."

"And when he doesn't?"

Her eyes hardened. "Then that's when I give it to him. I truly am a wife to him, the way Mom was to you."

And she knew she had won over her father. The man's shoulders relaxed and he got up to put some hot water on the fire for tea. "Alright. When I meet him, which will hopefully be soon," he glared at his daughter until she gave a nod, "I will give the two of you my blessing after I make my own assessment. But what did you want to see me about?"

She scratched the back of her neck nervously. "Well, his birthday and our anniversary are coming up, but I don't know what to get him for either day. I've already used up my options."

"What do you mean?"

"I've done all the things I can as a dragon. Flying, hunting, scales, there's nothing left I can give him that I haven't already."

"Why not give him something from a different form?"

She looked at him sharply. "What do you mean?"

"Well, he's only seen one of your forms. What if, as a gift, you showed him a different one? With the chain magic about to break, the only thing that could force it into action was if you lost the cloaking skin I sent you. A little jaunt into a different form won't affect it, as you proved tonight." The look on her face was priceless. It felt good to know he still had a sharp enough mind to mentally outpace his daughter sometimes.

Then her expression changed to joy. "Yes, that's perfect! Once Hiccup knows I can be human, he won't give up his dream of having a family!"

"Hiccup?" asked the man.

"Yes," she confirmed, blushing. "That's his name."

Her father laughed. "Then what does he call you? Sneeze?"

She straightened. "Milady Toothless, thank you very much. And I happen to like it."

He laughed even harder at that. "Well then, you'd best return to your Hiccup, Milady Toothless. But come and see me again when the chain magic wears off, and bring your husband. I want to make sure he knows how to make you happy."

She turned back to her father, halfway through her transformation. "He knows how to do that, Father. Believe me." And she flew off into the night, leaving the man chuckling. She hadn't lost a single ounce of that attitude.

****Enter another character! And you won't know this one unless you saw the second movie, or any of the previews, really. What did you think of my choice?****

****Please review, you guys are great at it!****

19. A Kerfuffle

Hiccup walked up the hill to the castle, a bundle of leather thrown over his shoulder. The dealer in town gave him a great deal on it, and its soft texture worked perfectly for the anniversary gift he had in mind for Toothless. Smiling at the prospect of adding the final touch to the perch for the forge, he walked through the gates and right into Sophia as she shouted at one of her handmaids. "I don't care, you just find it!"

Hiccup wanted to run from the fire-spitting female, but it wouldn't do to act so rude. So he set his bundle on the ground and asked, "Is something wrong?"

She rounded on him. "Yes. One of my ball gowns is missing!"

His interest intensified. Theft was a serious crime, for anyone. "Do you have an idea of who took it?"

"It was that dragon of yours!" she looked at him accusingly, but found the image difficult to maintain as he glowered at her.

"On what basis? And careful what you say. Royalty or not, that is still a high accusation. Without evidence, you'll be open to scrutiny yourself."

She flinched inwardly at the thought of the vase she smashed against the wall yesterday in an effort to find the missing dress. But she would not be cowed so easily. "I saw your dragon in my rooms yesterday, and when I woke up this morning the dress was gone."

Okay, thought the prince, she didn't have anything solid against Toothless. And she really was quite distressed about this. Perhaps he could help after all, and clear Toothless of suspicion at the same time. "I doubt Toothless could even lift the dress, but I'll help you look for it. What did it look like?"

She relaxed when the fire in his eyes smoldered instead of flamed. "It had short sleeves, crystal inlay winding around the bodice, and a floor length skirt that bunched to give a sort of layered effect." Toothless glided down and landed on Hiccup's shoulder as the other princess continued. "One of the tailors here made it for me, but it's

too small and shows my feet."

When she finished, the duo began turning their heads, looking around the courtyard for a hint of black or glimmer of crystal. Toothless chirped and took to the air, flying over to two servants carrying a basket of mending. Hiccup ran after her and, after she lifted up her skirts, Sophia followed. "Wait!" he called out to the servants. "I need to take a look in there." They stopped, rather anxious. What was going on? Hiccup caught up with them and rifled through the basket. When Sophia joined him, he held up the beautiful black bodice. "Is this the dress?"

She let out a highly undignified squeal and pulled the dress out of his hands and the basket, holding it up to her chest. He laughed at the site. "I guess it got a rip or something and they took it in to get mended. Not stolen, just getting fixed."

"Thank you," And, funny thing, she meant it. "I'm sorry I suspected your wife. But where was the tear?" She looked over the dress for a moment and moaned when she found the spot. It was right on the waistline, and the mending took away another few inches. There was no way she could fit in it now. But then she got an idea, to make up for her ridiculous accusations and get rid of one more dress than she needed. "I think you should keep this, Toothless." She handed the dress to Hiccup. "I probably won't ever wear it, and you can make a cape or something out of the fabric."

Deed done, she walked back into the castle and left the two of them just standing there, rather surprised by her generosity. "Well, Toothless, what do you think?" He held the dress up to his own torso. "Should I try it on?" She let out the dragon equivalent of a laugh and grabbed it in her talons, trying to pull it away from him.

He tugged against her for a moment before letting go, sending her tumbling through the air and landing in a heap of black fabric. She growled at her laughing husband, but felt her ire melt away against his smile. "Sorry. But you should probably get it back to our rooms before the mending division decides to steal it away again." She huffed and flew off in the direction of the door leading to their rooms, dress clutched firmly in her talons. Hiccup let out the breath he'd been holding. Hopefully, he could work on his project for Toothless in piece.

As he returned to the forge to begin sewing together the pad for the perch, Toothless flew into their room dragging the dress. She dropped the piece of clothing on the bed and shut the door by flying and pushing it with her snout. As soon as it closed, she removed the green dragon skin and bolted the door before turning to the dress.

She'd spent the last week looking for a dress that would fit her without too much tampering and was grand enough to make a superb impression. This dress had been a godsend when she first found it. Of course, Sophia had been a bit of a problem, but she needed the waist tucked in a few inches and the woman never wore it anyway. She thought the crystal beading too cheap for a princess, but it suited Toothless perfectly. And thanks to the tear Toothless had ripped in the fabric, the dress was too small for Sophia and the perfect size for her.

She slipped into it and did the buttons up in the back before she walked over to the changing screen and the mirror behind it. She examined herself in the large mirror as she pulled her hair out of the dress and let the black tresses flow down her back. A night fury for his birthday and a beautiful woman for his anniversary. Hiccup was going to be a very happy man.

I have a model I used to the dress, and I'll put the link up on my profile if you'd like so you can get a better idea. This wasn't intended to be its own chapter, but just sort of happened that way.

Please keep reviewing!

20. Night Fury Present

"Toothless, where are you taking me?" Asked Hiccup for the hundredth time as Toothless flew back to him and warbled earnestly at him. Then she flew back to her place in the lead and lighted on a branch, whistling and chirping at him. He smiled at her adorable figure and squeezed through the bushes and tried not to get caught in the vines as she reached the place where his draconic lady perched. She pecked him on the forehead and flew to a different branch, further ahead. He huffed and followed her. "Some people follow the stars or a map; no, not me, I get to follow a dragon!"

Something caught on his face and he flailed around, trying to find the source of the fine strands irritating his skin. Then he realized what it was and began combing his hair for the spider that wove the web nestled in his hair and draped across his face. Toothless laughed as he danced in place, trying to find something that was in fact, hanging by a thread from the branch the web had been attached to and nowhere on her husband. He realized that a moment after she did and glowered at her. She just laughed and flew to a branch out of reach of his vengeful hands.

He chased after her for a good five minutes, convinced she had led him right into that web. He moved much faster, crashing through the underbrush and tripping several times, although he caught himself each time. Finally, he barreled out of the woods and into a clearing with Toothless looking at him expectantly from the middle.

He scowled at her. "Some birthday this turned to be. My dad gave me an ax I can't even lift and Hamish gave me a crutch. Does he honestly think I need it?" Toothless stopped walking towards where she'd hidden the night fury skin and bounced back to her husband, curling up beside him. He reached down and rubbed where the flesh pressed into the prosthetic. "I mean, I've been missing my leg for over two years now. It's healed, and I'm used to it. He doesn't need to rub in the fact that I'mâ€|well, you know." She reached up and licked the tip of his chin. His frown switched places with a smile and he giggled at her. "I'll bet you have such a great gift for me that we had to come all the way out here for you to give it to me!" She laughed at that. Hiccup had no idea just how right he was.

Hiccup reached a hand out to scratch her nose, but she dodged and swayed so the outstretched fingers rested on her wedding chain instead, the clasp in particular. "You want me to take this off?" He asked, recognizing the gesture from numerous bedtimes. She chirped in

confirmation and he removed the necklace. Picking it up in her mouth, she flew into the forest to change.

Hiccup watched her go and, after about five minutes, reclined on his back to wait. He admired the clear sky and the way the setting sun painted the sky a myriad of colors when a rustle sounded behind him. Oh great. Now he was going to get eaten. But just as he was about to run, something glinted gold from the bushes. He laughed. "Toothless, you can come out now. I'm not falling forâ€¦!" And a huge black beast emerged from the forest.

Hiccup ran.

Over logs, through thorns, spider webs all over him but he didn't care because there was a huge black dragon back in that clearing and it wanted to eat him! A root tripped him and he tumbled forward, but was back on his feet and running again before the pain from the fall even registered past the panic. He reached a thin spot in the trees and suddenly the beast was there again, in front of him this time, cutting off his escape back to the castle. He started to run back. He'd loop around, get past a different way.

The dragon whimpered.

He stopped in his tracks. He knew that sound.

Slowly, heart still racing, he turned around and looked more closely at the beast. It really was beautiful, with a deep black color mixing with a little grey and massive wings that probably gave it incredible speed.

The dragon leaned forward slightly and dropped something on the ground. It lowered its gaze and backed away, letting Hiccup approach the item on the ground. It clinked when he picked it up, never taking his eyes from the dragon. Quickly, he glanced down and saw the source of the gold glint from earlier. It was Toothless' wedding chain. But there had been no sound of a struggle, not even a wisp of wind, something that would have come in gusts if this dragon had attacked from the sky. So why did it have Toothless' necklace?

He looked back up and big green eyes met his, exactly the same shade as the little dragon's who'd said yes almost a year ago. "Toothless?" She roared her yes to the skies and jumped around him, hopping and twisting in her delight. "How?" he asked, eyes wide. She just grinned at him. _That is for me to know and you to find out. _He smiled. "So you decided to show off and give me a birthday present at the same time?" She whacked him gently in the back of the head with her long black tail. "Okay!" He shielded his heads with his hands for a minute, but brought them back towards her in a hug. "Love, thank you." He backed out of the embrace, reached up and took her now much bigger face in his hands. "You are amazing." And he pressed his lips to hers.

A shiver traveled down her spine all the way to the tip of her tail at the contact. It was the first time Hiccup had initiated such an action between them. She melted into it, letting all four legs give out beneath her, although the tip of her tail rose into the air, fins fully fanned out. After a moment, Hiccup broke the content. "Well, shall we head back now?" She nodded before gesturing at her back. What she wanted was quite clear.

He glanced at the leathery wings and back to her. "Are you sure I won't hurt you or unbalance you." She snorted the very idea that someone as small as Hiccup could affect her flight was laughable. So he got on, hesitantly gripped her biggest ear flaps. She grinned to herself. This boy had no idea what he was in for. She crouched and with a powerful leap, launched into the heavens with a screaming Hiccup aboard.

****They'll go flying next chapter.****

21. Flying

After a short flight, they landed in the clearing from earlier and Toothless dumped Hiccup back onto the ground before rushing off to retrieve the green dragon skin. "Ow. Toothless, why'd you-" and she was back, skin in her mouth. He examined the dangling hide. "Is that how you did it?" She nodded. "Is it a dragon thing?" She tilted her head to the side as if she didn't quite understand the question. Truth was, she didn't know how to answer it without giving away what she was, and that part of the secret was for the day after tomorrow.

She dropped the skin into his outstretched hands and lowered herself to the ground again, motioning with her tail for him to get on. He mounted up, settling behind her ear plates and gripping them tightly. "I'm ready." It was a good thing he braced himself, because Toothless leapt into the air without holding back.

For a few fleeting seconds, he was terrified. The wind hurled him around and he clung to Toothless for dear life, not quite daring to look down as she climbed higher and higher. Whistling rang in his ears and some ridiculous part of him wondered if he'd ever hear anything else again. The rest was too busy trying to keep him on her back and not on its way to a reunion with the ground.

And then it was finished. The whistling lessened enough so he could hear himself think again, and the wind decided to just pull at his clothes. He eased his grip on the ear plates and looked around.

There must have been at least a hundred feet up. The trees weren't too far below them, so he could make out some individual trees, but it was high enough that they just looked like masses of green. Toothless warbled a question at him. "I'm fine, love. I'm more than fine actually," he replied, looking around more attentively. "This is amazing!"

The whole sky was painted in warm colors, bright and strong. The sky grew bright from the dark purple to the east, lightening until it lost all the blue to the red that halted just above the ball of molten white. It was as if someone had drawn a line across the sky, because everything above that line was red, while everything underneath it was an almost yellow orange. A few clouds littered the line, adding dashes of dusky purple to the border and letting the two colors mix along their edges, creating dozens of shades of orange.

The forest collided with the symphony of different shades and colors,

giving the music of the sky a definite, black, and detailed ending. The light seemed to outline every needle, every branch in the firs as they scraped the heavens. Hiccup forgot to breathe.

A shift beneath him brought his mind back from the horizon as Toothless flapped gently to keep them aloft. He leaned forward and inched his arms as far around that sinewy neck as he could and held her as she glided through the sunlit canvas. The sun fell behind the trees as they glided back towards the castle and while traces of color still lingered, most of the sky adopted a deep purple with black creeping up from the east.

Hiccup rose from his position where he rested his cheek against Toothless' scaly neck when she chirped at him softly. They were almost back at the castle, and she didn't want him to miss the view.

And what a view it was. An earthbound constellation built of torches, lights from windows, and watchtower fires outlined the castle in its fully glory of turrets, balconies, and sturdy wall. As they flew closer, more of the castle became visible. The torches extended their halos of fire to the walls they were mounted on, making the rough stone gleam like polished marble. The windows illuminated the scenes within and he watched as one of the knights sharpened his sword, two of the younger servant boys had a pillow fight in their dormitory, and one of the seamstress's assistants stitching something.

Slowly, Toothless brought them close enough to hear the night sounds of the huge building. Guards complained about watch duty and Hiccup laughed at their somewhat witty remarks. Why didn't they ever talk like that around him? Probably scared they'd offend him somehow.

But then two more voices broke through the normal sounds of the night. A man and woman yelling at each other. And it sounded suspiciously Like Hubert and Clarice. They circled the wall and the conversation gained clarity. "How did I know I was supposed to be at the meeting?" Clarice seemed to have missed some important queen business again and was trying to defend herself.

"It was a meeting about the ball to celebrate the triple anniversary! I thought you'd want to be there!" Hiccup admired his brother for trying to keep some kindness in his voice. If Toothless ever disrespected him when he was only trying to be kind, he probably wouldn't have been able to keep his cool as well as Hubert.

There was a pause as Clarice took in this new information. "I'm sorry, but did you say ball?"

"Yes!" Now Toothless was interested. A ball would be the perfect place to unveil her human side.

But as she glided down into the balcony above the arguing couple, Hiccup pulled at her, protesting. "Toothless, we shouldn't eavesdrop on them. I'm sure we'll hear about it later." Reluctantly, she flew back up and landed in the courtyard next to the stables. Hiccup eyed the building. "Are you going to change in there?" She chirped her yes.

Hiccup leapt off her back and managed not to stumble on his left leg. Toothless reached around and nuzzled him in the chest before taking

the green skin from him and darting into the stables. He turned his back on the building and felt his knees give out. "That has to be the most terrifying and the most incredible thing I have ever experienced." Toothless flew out of the stable and landed in his lap. He stroked her wings, just the way she liked at and whispered, "Thank you, Toothless." He walked back up to his chambers, Toothless tucked neatly in his arms.

****There you go. It must be some unwritten law that all HTTYD stories have to have a flying sequence somewhere. And we got a glimpse into the married life of the other princes too!****

****Please review.****

22. Human Again

"Can you believe him? I mean, out of all the ways to celebrate the anniversary, he picks a ball? Why couldn't it be a wrestling competition or something? Everyone knows I'm bad at that, so I don't have anything to lose," he argued as he straightened his fur cape around his shoulders, although the clasp now had a small polished scale fragment from Toothless in the crown.

She trilled in agreement, but for very different reasons. She was just surprised someone like Stoick, a man who valued physical ability above finesse, would even think to host a gathering this lovely. It was the perfect way to unveil herself. Hiccup turned around and threw his arms out to the sides. "Well, what do you think?"

She ran her eyes down him. Neatly brushed brown hair, absolutely adorable face, slim but still substantial shoulders outlined by the fur cape and gold clasp, and lithely muscular torso sadly hidden by the green linen jerkin ending in an intricate mass of exquisite leatherwork that doubled as a belt. From there, simple brown pants ending in one boot and one prosthetic shined almost to a blinding degree. Hiccup cleaned up very nicely in her opinion.

She roared her approval and Hiccup laughed. "Now it's your turn." He walked toward her wardrobe and began rifling through the different dragon dresses the seamstresses had made her. He drew out a light blue one, a good color for her green hide, but she only had her eye on one dress tonight. As he withdrew from the piece of furniture with the dress in hand, she flew past him and grabbed the dress Sophia had gifted her with a few days ago.

Eyebrows went up at her choice. "Alright, but I don't know how you would wear that. I'll put this behind the curtain for you just in case." He did so and slunk over to their bed, waiting for her to finish up. "You know, you can dance, Toothless," he speculated from the bed. "Remember that time in the forge? It might now have been a court dance, but it was fun." He laughed, not noticing the lack of conversation on her part. "What do you think Toothless," he asked turning back around to look at the screen. His jaw dropped.

The green dragon skin was hanging over the top of the screen.

He jumped towards her. "No, no, Toothless. You can't go to the ball as a big dragon, you'll scareâ€¦" And suddenly his throat went very dry as he saw the girl in the dress Toothless had brought behind the

curtain.

The dress was a masterpiece, no doubt about that. Flaring as it reached the floor, but narrowing at such an angle that it hugged the woman's upper thighs perfectly, it maintained the woman's figure all the way to her shoulders. The color was a dark black, the same as Toothless' colors in her other form, with crystal beading around the waist and bust line, drawing your eyes but not interrupting the flow of the dress.

But the garment was nothing compared to the one wearing it. She was just about his height, perhaps an inch taller, but that dress made her look longer and more elegant than a graceful elm. The face was strong, stronger than what most would consider ideal beauty, but had well-proportioned features and lips the pink of their favorite fruit, strawberries. He wondered if she tasted like them too. He had the weirdest urge to grab and kiss her as he ran his hair through that long black hair to see if it really was as smooth and thick as it looked. Then he remembered the incident he'd had weeks ago. "It wasn't a dream."

She blinked. That was not what she'd been expecting. "What?"

"That night, the night I had that attack, a woman came and helped me through the pain. I thought it was a dream, but it was you, wasn't it?"

She remembered now. "Yes, it was. But I had to do whatever I could! You were thrashing and you wouldn't listen to Mark, so I thought-

He put a hand on her tensed shoulder. "I'm glad that it was you. But why on earth would you hide from me? You could have told me that night, I would have listened." She shrank from the question. She'd broken his trust with this, when she had only wanted to- "Were you afraid I wouldn't really love you if I saw this?"

No. It was impossible. No one could be that pure.

She looked back into his eyes, into him. Hiccup saw the action and answered it, using the hand on her shoulder to pull her into an embrace. "You don't need to be afraid of me, no matter what skin you wear." She rested in that knowledge, letting it engulf her. "But I will want to hear why you hid." She tensed. How was she going to explain? "Later. Right now, I want to dance with my beautiful wife and put those other women to shame."

He let go of her and offered his arm. "Shall we?" She smiled, purely human for the first time he knew of, and wound her arm around his. They left the room together and shocked the socks off Mark in the hallway, on his way to get them for the festivities.

The servant just stood there for several moments before his head settled enough for him to speak. "Excuse me sire, but who is that?" He pointed at the beauty on his prince's arm.

Hiccup's grin would have split his face. "This is my wife. I think she's quite beautiful this way, don't you?"

Mark did his best impression of a fish.

That expression became a common sight for the pair as they passed various servants, knights, and even a few of the guests in the corridors. Only a few went beyond gawking and actually talked to the pair.

Gawain closed his mouth in an effort to maintain his knightly image and approached Hiccup and the woman who had his mind in knots. "Sire, It is an excellent night for a ball. May I inquire as to why this young lady is accompanying you and not Milady?"

Hiccup feigned confusion. "But Gawain, this is Milady. She wouldn't miss the dance for the world, right?" He turned to his wife, begging her to play along.

Fortunately, Toothless loved a good prank almost as much as he did. "Of course, my dear husband. We must keep going, or we'll be late." And with that, they strode off in the direction of the ball room, leaving the knight somewhat stunned behind them. But then Hiccup winked at Gawain and the knight relaxed and followed the pair to the room where the cream of the land waited for the royals to process in and begin the celebration. Boy, were they in for a surprise.

****There you have it. If anyone would like to know what the dress looks like, the link is in my profile.****

****Please Review! How did you like his initial reaction to Toothless? Did I make her too beautiful to be realistic?****

23. It's all in the Footwork

Stoick sat on his throne, admiring the crowd in his massive hall. The place had been scrubbed until it gleamed, letting the candlelight from the chandeliers overhead flicker off the stone and various metal fixtures, just as the fire from the hearth painted its surroundings in orange and red. A table to one side of the room groaned under the weight of so many finger foods that the guests didn't know what to choose first.

Many guests oohed at the impressive display of lavish wealth and taste, a surprising feast for their ruggedly inclined host. Of course, he'd probably had help in the planning from tonight's guests of honor, the three princes and their wives. Once the six royals processed into the room, the festivities could really begin.

Clarice waited just behind the huge double doors at the head of the procession. Straightening her satin clad back, she reminded herself how important tonight was in the process of proving herself a fit enough queen. She rested a hand on the silver pendant at her throat, confident in her supremacy as the wife of the heir. Besides, it was just a dance. No chance for sabotage in that.

Hamish pulled his arm away from Sophia as she attempted to pull him closer. "Calm yourself."

To his chagrin, she thrust her nose into the air. "I am calm. I only thought to comfort you, shaking as you are."

He growled. "That's a bold faced lie."

She sneered at him. "A lady never lies."

He glared at her and was about to open his mouth in a retort when Gawain, who'd run ahead to inform the party of Hiccup's arrival with Toothless tapped him on the shoulder. "Sire, a word please?" The second prince bit back his tongue and turned towards the other man. "Hiccup will arrive soon with Milady."

The prince smiled. "Shaking in his boots, probably."

Gawain raised his voice. "Even if he was, Milady would support him and help steady his nerves, no matter how much he might deny it." With that the knight turned and headed back in the direction of the youngest royal.

Hamish turned back to his bride, who still had her nose in the air. She raised a hand to check her earring and the prince noticed that it was shaking. He walked up and took her hand. "Don't worry, you look fine." He smiled inwardly as the trembling lessened and she put her hand back on his arm.

But she just had to ruin the moment. "Why the sudden change of heart?"

He flinched. "Let's just say I'm taking a bit of advice." She huffed at him and turned her face away, but Hamish just chuckled to himself. All the trembling was gone now. He could work on the attitude later, with perhaps a little more help from Gawain. The man might have more useful tidbits.

Footsteps sounded through the hall, a very distinctive mix of soft thuds and short scrapes. Sure enough, Hiccup halted just in time to avoid slamming into his older brother. "It's about t-" What on earth had his kid brother done to get a woman like that? And where was the little dragon?

"Who's she?" sneered Sophia. "Was Toothless so embarrassed that she sent a proxy? For shame."

"Indeed, that would be shameful, if that was what I'd done," replied the woman. "I'm just here for a dance with my husband."

Sophia laughed, drawing the attention of the pair at the front. "Toothless is a filthy little dragon who can't even cook properly without help from her runt of a husband. Tell me, what tricks did you use to make Hiccup believe your silly story?"

"Sophia," Hamish warned.

But Hubert had heard enough. "Hiccup, while Sophia has been most disrespectful to both you and Milady, she's partway right. You can't expect us to believe that your wife suddenly became human."

"Actually," rebutted Hiccup, "that's exactly what I'm asking. Show them, Toothless." The woman pulled her marriage chain out of her dress, complete with her ring and the pin Hiccup had made her. "You saw me make that pin, Hubert. It's one of a kind. And there's also the fact that I watched her transform, or close enough to it."

Toothless tucked the chain back into her dress. "So the question is, do you trust me to know my own wife?"

Hubert breathed deeply. "You'll have to convince Dad that she's Toothless."

Hiccup nodded. "Won't be a problem. Now let's go in." The eldest prince nodded to his youngest brother and nodded to the servants by the door.

Inside the ball room, the herald trumpeted to get everyone's attention. "I present their royal highnesses, Crown Prince Hubert and Crown Princess Clarice." The first couple entered and the populace hummed with comments.

"Such regal bearing for a prince."

"I can't believe the flounces on that dress."

"You think his cape flares when he dances?"

The pair walked between the crowd and joined King Stoick at the front of the room. Bowing to the man, Hubert and his wife moved to one side of the great throne, his right hand side. The crowd and three royals then turned their attention back to the door and the Herald called out, "I present their royal highnesses, Prince Hamish and Princess Sophia." The second couple swept into the room, creating their own buzz.

"Look at the jewels in that necklace!"

"I don't think the prince looks very happy. Do you think they had a fight?"

"You can tell she's from Noble stock. Look at those features! Lovely woman, that is."

This pair also proceeded to the foot of the throne, bowing before the king and walking to stand on his left side. The herald waited for the populace to calm down for the third entry, but they seemed entirely focused on the couples already present in the room. He resorted to the trumpet.

Parp! Now he had their attention. "I present their royal highnesses, Prince Hiccup and Princess Milady Toothless." The door opened and the people roared to life.

"I thought Toothless was a dragon!"

"She is. The prince must have substituted someone else."

"That's not proper, although he did chose quite a beauty. Look at that hair!"

"Who is she?"

"Don't look at me, this is the first time I've seen her."

"He's playing us for fools."

Dissent rumbled around them as they walked to the front of the room and faced the king head on. Stoick was not pleased. "Son, you will go get Toothless and leave this girl out of it."

"But -"

"No arguments, son."

"Father," Hubert mediated, "I think you should let Hiccup explain."

"No. The boy brought a different girl to his own anniversary ball. It's a disgrace!"

"I'm sorry, Father, but you are incorrect," said a voice with a warble and a chirp somewhere inside it. "I am Hiccup's wife, and I can prove it."

Stoick sat back in his throne for a moment and examined the girl who dared speak to him. She did have Toothless' green eyes, and Hiccup was not an easy lad to fool, especially about the things he knew well. You couldn't sell Hiccup faulty steel, so an imposter bride would have to get past him first. And this girl obviously had. "Alright, prove you're Milady Toothless."

"Hiccup, could you ask the musicians to play our song?" He grinned at her idea and motioned to the conductor to approach.

He whispered in the man's ear and the musician smiled. "Of course, Your Highness." Hiccup and the woman walked to the center of the floor and motioned to the musicians to ready themselves. Then the prince began to whistle.

Stoick recognized the tune immediately. It was the song passed through the generations of their family, a love song meant only for them and their spouses. If this woman could sing her part and complete the complicated dance that accompanied it, she would indeed prove her identity as Hiccup's wife. As Hiccup began to sing the opening lines, he genuflected with Toothless standing in front of him, turned away. "I'll swim and sail on savage seas, with nary a fear of drowning, and gladly ride the waves of life if you will marry me." At the last two words, Toothless took a step back so that her left foot was right in front of his son's right, hands at her sides.

"No scorching sun, nor freezing cold," he grabbed her left hand with his right and pulled her to face him as she pivoted on the foot she'd stepped back with. "Will stop me on my journey," He raised the hand and placed it on his shoulder as he stood, moving his now free hand to her waist. "If you will promise me your heart," he grabbed her other hand in his free one and took a step forward with the prosthetic, moving it right in front of her other foot. "And love me for eternity," He stepped forward with his left, then right, with the mismatched limbs meeting between each step and Toothless following.

"My dearest one, my darling dear," She stepped forward with her left, let her feet meet, and did the same with her right. Hiccup mimicked her movements with his hand at her waist. "Your mighty words astound me." She pushed off his shoulder and raised her right hand so she

spun under their connected arms. "But I've no need of mighty deeds," she spun away from him and took his other hand. "When I feel your arms around me." She spun into his arms until her back rested against his chest with both his arms crossed over her.

"But I would bring you rings of gold, I'd even sing you poetry." He let go of her hands and she spun again, with his left hand on her waist. After a full circle, he caught her right hand and stretched out their arms. "And I would keep you from all harm," She spun into their joined hands until she was entirely circled by them, pulled tight against his body. He placed the other arm protectively around her, glaring playfully at the rest of the crowd. They laughed, enjoying the dance. "If you would stay beside me." He spun her out again, still holding onto her left hand with his right.

"I have no use for rings of gold, I care not for your poetry." He genuflected and she circled him, not breaking their hand hold. "I only want your hand to hold." Toothless ended the circle and sat on his bent knee as he grabbed her free hand. "I only want you near me." They rose into their previous position, hand on shoulder and waist with the other two still held firmly.

They sang the next part together, stepping to the side in time with the increasing tempo. Using their feet as the pen, they drew two interlocking circles on the floor. The guests began to clap to the music as they finished the second circle and started on the last lines.

They grabbed each other's hands and placed their left feet together, spinning on their shared axis by pushing off with their right feet. "I'll swim and sail on savage seas, with nary a fear of drowning, and gladly ride the waves of life if you will marry me." They held out the last note for as long as they could, leaning back against the other's pull, and when they finished, the whole room roared to life. There was little doubt now that Toothless had pulled off the transformation of the century.

She leaned on Hiccup, still a bit dizzy from the spin at the end. "I think I like the dance better this way."

"Yeah," answered the man with a chuckle.

I tried to write the dance in such a way that you could try it yourselves if you wanted to. I went over it about five times with my littlest sisters to make sure I got it right. What did you guys think?

By the way, If you like HTTYD, I highly recommend Justin and the Knights of Valor. The main character could be Hiccup's older brother, and it has some very funny flying.

Please Review!

24. Other Performances

The laughter and applause died down as Stoick's voice boomed out over the crowd. "Well done, you two! That certainly was something. You did that almost as well as me and Valka, and we'd had years of practice. Come sit down with me, you two. Hamish, get your wife on that dance

floor." People chuckled at their king's honest but joking words and watched as Sophia and Hamish walked to the center of the ballroom.

There was no nervousness in her eyes now. They blazed. How dare that little tramp try to upstage her and Clarice like that? She was a dragon in a borrowed dress. How dare she act like a real princess! Well, Sophia would put the little tramp in her place. She stood stiffly with her back to her husband as the music started.

The dance was not a pretty one. Sophia was so focused on making her dress flare that when she took that first step back, she stepped on Hamish's toes. The first spin went without trouble, and as he moved her into position, Hamish hoped that the first movement had just been nerves. He didn't fancy sore toes.

The simple footwork built the princess's ego enough to try and spruce up the dance. So on the second turn, she tried to spin twice in the time allotted for the single turn. As a result, she took a beat too long to get into position. The next turn was rushed, her confidence shaken. Hamish pulled her in for the "arms around me line," and hoped to high heaven that she could pull off the timing on this next spin.

The next verse went well enough, since it was mostly him doing the work. He caught her hand at the end of the waist turn, and started off the circle into his chest before spinning her out again. He smiled and, for once, she smiled back at him, even if it was small and scared.

But when she circled him, Sophia tripped over his extended leg. She caught herself, but stumbled and lost track of the music. So she just ran and sat on Hamish's knee, even though she wasn't supposed to for five more beats of music. They rose back up, the princess blushing madly and the prince trying to recover the rhythm. Just two more verses and this would be over.

They managed the circular waltz well enough, although she did step with the wrong foot once or twice since she couldn't see her feet with such a long skirt. They grabbed hands and began to spin, and the smile returned to the prince's face. It was almost over. Then, when they leaned back for the final note, Sophia's silk slippers lost traction on the floor and they slid out from under her. She landed with a thud and one of the guest tactlessly laughed. Sophia hid her face.

Hamish glared at the guffawing guest and they quickly silenced themselves. He reached down and offered his hand to the fallen princess. "Let me help."

She looked up at him, eyes unusually bright, and slipped her hand into his. He put his other hand on her back between her shoulders and helped her to her feet. Bowing and curtsying, they left the floor to join Hiccup, Toothless, and Stoick. At least it was over.

Hubert and Clarice strode out onto the floor with their arms hooked and motioned for the musicians to begin. The beginning pantomime was sweet, Clarice's first verse smooth in both sound and movement. The Crown Prince began his next part. "But I would bring yoAHHH!" He tore his hand away from Clarice and blood splattered on the floor. Several

people rushed forward, asking questions on top of each other and not doing a whit of good.

"Silence!" Stoick bellowed over the cacophony. "Let us through!" Hiccup, Hamish, Toothless, Sophia and Stoick all ran towards the couple. Sophia went to comfort her shocked and whimpering fellow princess and Hamish helped to get the crowd of guests back under control while the other three royals tended to the wounded prince.

There was a long gash down almost half his left palm, the hand he'd been using to spin Clarice. Fury built behind Stoick's eyes as he looked at the cowering perpetrator. "How dare you wound my son, your own husband! I don't care if you are married to him or not, you are not allowed to hurt him like this!"

She sobbed out, "I wasn't trying to hurt him. We were dancing and-"

"He had his hand on your waist! You must have done something!"

That gave Hiccup an idea. "Toothless, can you keep his wound under control?"

She nodded. "What are you going to do?"

"I just want to check something." He pulled on his father's arm. "Dad, I don't think this was intentional. Let me check something." The king ceased his tough lashing and Hiccup approached the pair of women. He asked, "My lady, can I see your belt?"

Sobbing, Clarice unclipped the beautiful piece of woven gold wires and handed it to him before returning to the refuge of Sophia's arms. Hiccup inspected the piece until he found droplets of red clinging to the metal. He brushed a hand over the area gently and winced. Then he smiled. "I knew it." He held the belt up to his father. "It's fine, Dad. She just had a wire loose. The sharp end tore Hubert's hand when he spun her with his hand on her waist."

"Then why didn't it hurt when I put my hand there the first time?" Asked Hubert, now with his hand wrapped in Toothless' handkerchief.

Hiccup thought for a moment before approaching Clarice again. "Can you put this back on?" She nodded and straightened, buckling the belt around her waist. Hiccup looked again for the misplaced end and found it. "You didn't feel it before because it was on the other side of her body. But it's alright. She just needs to get the belt fixed. This was a total accident."

Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, even Hubert. He hustled off to get a proper bandage for his hand and Clarice left to discard the gold belt in favor of a leather one. It was less fine, but it wouldn't hurt anyone. She was just glad Stoick had been calmed down before he ordered something drastic in consequence for injuring his son. The man was like a mother bear when it came to his children.

Back in the hall, the guests began to mingle and many came up to the youngest of the royal couples to congratulate them on their splendid

dance from earlier. Hiccup couldn't stop rubbing the back of his neck and Toothless was permanently flushed.

Hiccup noticed her rather pink state. "Would you like me to get you something to drink?"

She grabbed at the relief from compliments. "Yes, thank you. I'll just wait over there." She pointed at a sequestered table.

Hiccup understood perfectly. He laughed and headed off to the refreshments table. As he reached for the tap, a man placed a cup under the nozzle and filled it to the brim. "Good evening, Your Highness. That was quite a splendid dance, and an even more splendid princess." He handed the prince the full mug. "Thanatos the Scarlet."

****Pay Attention to the last paragraph. Thanatos is going to be very important later. Did anyone like the stunt I pulled with Clarice and the belt?****

****Please Review!****

25. No!

The big man filled a second tankard for himself and started walking back in the direction of Toothless with Hiccup. "I was a bit worried about how you would perform that with a dragon, but she certainly solved that problem for you, My Prince."

"Yes," he replied, smiling. "She's always surprising me like that."

"I'm sure," they dodged a pair of chattering ladies "that some surprises are more pleasant than others." He flicked his free hand and made a few more guests intercept their route to the princess. "Today's must have been quite the treat."

"Yes, but," he dodged one of his brothers talking to a general, "I don't think it changed anything."

"What do you mean?" Thanatos asked. How on earth could the boy say that? Was he blind to her beauty?

Hiccup stopped walking and faced the man head on. "Well, I loved her before she showed me that she could be human. Now I know that we can have a family together, and that does make me happy, but I still think I would have loved her."

Great gronkles, what was the boy made of? He wouldn't convince him this way. Thanatos switched tactics. "But are you sure she feels that way? I mean, People who can change like thatâ€¦"

The prince turned away and started walking again. "Whatever the legends might be, I'm sure that Toothless means no harm to those inside the palace. If she was going to hurt any of us, she would have done it already."

He jumped to her defense. Good. "Oh no, My Prince, it's about their abilities, not their behavior."

Hiccup turned to face the man again. He did want to know more about Toothless, and the more he knew the less she would need to tell him. It obviously made her uncomfortable. "What do you mean?"

"Well," began the man, "In all the legends, these skin changers only had two forms, usually a human and dragon form. But if they chose to take a third form, usually smaller than the other twoâ€¦well the constant changes in body size would eventually kill them. And I did notice that the dragon Toothless is much smaller than the human Toothless, so I just wondered." He sighed. "But perhaps I'm overthinking this." Hiccup ran back to Toothless and the man smiled.

He reached Toothless quickly and almost shoved the cup into her hands. "I'll be right back. I need toâ€¦ahâ€¦check on the kitchens." And he ran out of the ballroom leaving a dazed Toothless behind clutching a tankard.

He ran through the corridors and up the stairs. His mind was spinning. Toothless had three forms, the black dragon form, her human form, and the green dragon form. If there was any chance that what Thanatos had said was true, then every time Toothless changed into that green skin, she was hurting herself. He had to get rid of it before she did herself serious injury with the thing.

He tore open the door to their room and ran for the changing screen with the green skin draped over the top, just where she'd left it. He grabbed one of the paws and pulled the thing off the top of the screen. It was so small in his hands. How long had Toothless been squeezing herself into this, probably cramping her body in an effort to fit into it? Well, she wouldn't have to for much longer.

Hiccup took the fire poker and stirred up the coals in the fireplace. "Come on, come on." He urged the coals back to a ruddy red with his breath. He glanced over at the door to make sure no one was coming and put a fresh log on the hot coals. Then he waited for the flames to start growing, hoping, wringing out the edge of his dress tunic. As soon as the log started to darken, he took the skin and threw it into the flames. He had a moment of relief before something odd happened. The room started to smell.

It was the sickly sweet smell of burning flesh. Hiccup almost gagged and ran to open the windows and flood the smell out of the room. That was a bad idea. The wind carried the smell to the ball room where Toothless got just a whiff of it.

No. He couldn't have.

She abandoned the trio of women trying to maintain her attention and ran for the door in much the same fashion Hiccup had earlier. The smell got stronger as she neared their rooms and her heart fell with it. There was only one thing that smelled like that, like fire and burning flesh and a sharp tinge of magic.

She crashed through the doors, ran past Hiccup, frantically fanning the smell out the windows, and collapsed in front of the fireplace. She grabbed the poker and tried to get the skin off the flames, but every time she hooked it, that spot crumbled to ash. Throwing away the fire implements, she reached in with her bare hands and grabbed

the skin, burning herself. She yelped from the pain and Hiccup ran back to her from the windows.

He grabbed her hands and inspected them. "What were you thinking?"

"What were you thinking?" she yelled into his face. "Why did you burn that?" Was it because he no longer loved her in any other form? Was lust only now consuming him?

"I thought it was hurting you."

Okay, that was not the answer she expected. "Why did you think that?"

"One of the guests told me that smaller forms hurt you because you have to shrink to fit inside them." He gulped. "I thought I was helping."

"Who told you this?" He hesitated. "Tell me!"

"His name was Thanatos. I just met him tonight. But he seemed to know a lot about you, so I-"

"Thanatos?" she interrupted. "Thanatos the Scarlet?"

"Yes, that was his name. He told me that skinchangers-"

She grabbed him by the shoulders. "Hiccup, that was the Red Death! I've been hiding from him for over a year!"

"What? Why?" He mirrored her actions, gripping her.

She sighed inwardly. This was not how she pictured telling him the truth. "I'm a skinchanger, someone who takes on different forms by wrapping themselves in the hide of an animal. Usually, we have two forms, the human form we're born in and our dragon form. Don't ask me how we get that skin, my dad didn't teach me that yet."

The Red Death is one of us, but greedy. He stole me from my father for my beauty and kept me enslaved. I tried to leave, but he had me in chain magic. It acts like a chain tied to a post. You can't get a certain distance away from the caster, no matter how hard you try. And if they move, the boundaries move with them and the chain magic tugs you in that direction. But I found out that the spell had a time limit."

My father contacted me from the outside using a bat skin and I told him about the spell's limits. The next day, he smuggled in the green skin with a letter, saying that if I wore the skin, I could get away from the Red Death and wait for the spell to expire. It expired tomorrow."

"So it's fine," Hiccup tried to reassure. "You didn't need the skin anyway."

"No. If he's here in the castle, the boundaries from the spell are already on me. And with the skin gone, I can't escape again." She looked up at him, tears beginning to fall. "I'll have to leave with him."

But instead of despairing, Hiccup's face grew hard. "Then tell me how to beat him. I'm not going to let him take you."

Those words gave Toothless courage. "My father will know how to help. He lives to the north of here, near an inlet on the coast. Just look for the huge white dragon. Ah!" Something forced her back. "It's the boundaries, they're pulling at me!"

"No! You can't go!" But despite his protests, she yanked out her night fury skin, stripped off the dress and quickly replaced it with the skin.

She opened the window. "I'm sorry, I don't have a choice." She finished the transformation and flew through the window to where Thanatos the Scarlet, as he liked to call him human form, waited for the prettiest of all his captives.

When Mark came into the room to bring him and Toothless back to the ball, he saw Hiccup standing hunched over, Toothless' dress in his arms. "Where's Toothless?" asked their friend.

"Gone," breathed the prince. "And it's my fault."

****Kudos to those who guessed about Thanatos last chapter! He is the Big Bad in this story. Because of him, the rating on this story might go up due to some hints of lust and such, but absolutely nothing graphic, just innuendo, really. ****

****Please Review!****

26. Wait For Me

****This is my attempt at creating a sort of montage in my story. The italicized lines are lyrics from "Wait for Me" by Theory of a dead man, although I did tweak some of them. You can read without the song or pull it up from youtube and listen while you read. I just wanted to try this.****

You are not alone tonight, imagine me there by your side. It's so hard to be here so far away from you.

Toothless looked over her shoulder at the receding castle as the barrier forced her to follow Thanatos. She could still see light from Hiccup's window, even though it was getting late.

I'm counting the seconds 'till I begin, to bring you back home, make up for my sin.

He stripped off his clothes and gently lifted the pendant over his head, but he didn't put it down. Instead, he got into the bed and laid flat on his back, but the attempt at sleep was in vain. His mind was spinning with preparations for tomorrow when he would set out to find her. But he also couldn't stop thinking about how all this was his fault.

_ I might be forever 'till I return to you._

The gates closed behind her as the Red Death sealed her inside his

castle again and she looked back through the bars. The clang was all too familiar from the last time she'd been a prisoner here, but the feeling of leaving someone behind was different. This time she knew Hiccup would come for her as soon as possible, and not wait to find out more information. Still, she could be here a while.

But it helps me on this lonely night, it's the one thing that keeps me alive, knowing that you

Hiccup curled up on the bed, the scale pendant Toothless had given him encased in his hands as he slept sweetly, comforted by her smell on the pillows left there from the countless nights they'd spent together. But without the weight of her scaly body next to him, his slumber was restless.

Wait for me, ever so patiently.

The moment Death threw her into her tower room, she ran to the window and peered out in the direction of Hiccup, hoping to catch even a glimpse of the stone walls that had become her home. There was none, and she chided herself for thinking she might still see even the top of the wall. But she had to trust that she would see those walls again, that he would come for her.

No one else knows the feeling inside. I imagine your smile as you tell me goodnight, because it's the sound of your voice that brings me home.

She looked over at the scantily clad bed frame and imagined Hiccup sitting on it, hands out to remove her chain necklace so she could sleep more comfortably. She took off the chain and hung it on the bedpost, before lying down and closing her eyes.

_ It's never been easy to say,_

He hoisted the pack on his shoulders in the weak sunlight streaming in from his window. He tucked the pendant into the collar of his shirt and headed out the door and towards the kitchens for food for the trip.

_ But it's easier when I'm on my way, knowing that you wait for me._

He headed out through the castle gates and down the hill towards the village. He stopped for a moment to admire the full glory of the sunrise and hoped that, wherever she was, she could see it.

_ Ever so patiently. Yeah, you're everything I've ever dreamed of having and_

She watched from her bed as the red and orange eastern sky faded and hoped he'd been watching it too. With his face in her mind, she steeled herself to face her enemy over breakfast as she brushed off the skin tied around her body and walked out the door, heading for the dining room. She would face this beast that was everything Hiccup was not, knowing that the better half of her was coming.

> It's everything I need from you just knowing that you wait for me.

He trekked down the path in the middle of the forest, the one that

led to the coast. There was a flash of bright green at the edge of his vision and he whipped his head around, only to find that the color had been the lime green tips on the branches of a pine at the edge of the road. He let his shoulders sag for a moment, but brightened when he saw a bird wheeling overhead. It was a seagull.

_ What I'd give, what I'd do, knowing I'm not there for you, makes him easy to fight._

She entered the dining room and successfully ignored her forced host, remembering that one time Hiccup coaxed her out of bed with sausage. Maybe the next time they had breakfast together, she could try doing that. And no matter how loudly Thanatos sneered, she didn't look at him.

_ What I'd give, what I'd be, anything to bring you home with me, and this time you'll stay._

His hand slipped off the ledge of the sea bluff he was climbing down to get to the cottage at the base of the rock, on the beach. He quickly grabbed another rock jutting out and looked down to find a better foothold for his prosthetic. He'd seen the big white dragon from a distance, so this had to be the place Toothless had told him about. He took a deep breath and took another step down.

_ And you wait for me,_

Death still tried to engage her in conversation, trying to convince her to look at him. Finally he grew tired of her silence and grabbed her chin. When he did, she knocked his hand away with a wave of her own. He drew back roaring at her, but she simply returned to her meal. She would hold out as long as Hiccup needed her too. No matter what the cost, she thought as Death took away her flight privileges for the rest of the day.

_ Ever so patiently._

Hiccup dropped the last three feet to the beach and turned around to face the man standing at the entrance to the hut, wrapped in a large white dragon skin. He would not run away from this. He would own up for his mistakes, how he put Toothless in that horrible situation, even if he had to do it to her father. And maybe, after he had the apology out of the way, he could ask the man for his help.

_ Yeah, you're everything I've ever dreamed of having, and_

_ It's everything I need from you just knowing that you_

_ Wait for me._

****Please Review!****

27. Advice

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Clarice watched from a window set in the wall of the tower's spiral staircase as Hiccup walked out through the front gates with a pack thrown on his back. She, no, the whole kingdom had always ridiculed

him as the weakest royal, but she wondered if the other princes would have the courage to just up and leave like that, without armor or guards to fight someone probably much stronger than themselves. Toothless just helped him show that off.

She looked down at her left palm. After last night, she felt like such a fool. Dancing was meant to be something wonderful between her and her husband, but all she'd done was hurt him. And then Hiccup, someone she almost despised, had come to her rescue and spoken sense to the king when he'd been ready to rip her wedding ring off her finger and throw it to the next available maiden. She would have left him or Toothless to their fate if that had happened to them, but he'd turned around and helped her. And she had done nothing to deserve that.

She wiped at her eyes and looked back out the window, seeing his small back in the distance, a spot of the tawny fabric he'd used for his pack growing smaller by the minute. "He loves you, Toothless," she said to the empty air. "I don't know what you did to deserve that kind of love, but I wish you could tell me, so I could try it." Her gaze lingered on the windowpane until she could bear it no longer and stood up, walking back up the spiral staircase to her small study room.

Hubert stood below, just out of sight of the window but within hearing range. And his wife's words bit deeply into his conscience. If his wife was so unhappy with her marriage to him that she cried at the thought of a loving couple, what did that make him as a husband? He may not love Clarice as deeply as Hiccup loved Toothless, but that didn't mean he had no feelings for the girl. No, he needed to find a way to express his feelings. Hubert went to find his remaining brother. Perhaps he could help.

"Honestly, I'm having just about as much luck with Sophia as you are with Clarice," Hamish replied as he fired off another arrow. Hubert had finally tracked his brother down on the archery training grounds and asked him for advice about his situation with Clarice. He hadn't given anything particularly useful, so far.

But he wasn't giving up just yet. "You had a better time at the ball, and she seems to be taking Hiccup's departure better than Clarice. Is there anything you might have done?"

Hamish notched another arrow but paused in thought before bringing the string back to his ear. "Well, I did take a piece of advice from Gawain just before Hiccup and Toothless showed up." He pulled back the arrow and fired. "Why don't you go grab a bow yourself? Could get some nice practice in."

The elder sighed. He was beginning to understand why Hiccup never tried to hold a conversation with Hamish. The boy couldn't concentrate on anything that didn't involve weapons. But he tried to steer his brother back onto the subject of women and advice. "What did Gawain say to you?"

"Well, he said that even if Hiccup didn't admit that he was scared, Toothless would help him not to be without making a big deal out of it." Hamish relaxed the string and let the arrow dip from firing angle as he thought about that for a moment. "It worked too. She stopped being so nervous and I didn't have to fight with her about

it. I'll have to ask him for more advice later."

"Thank you, Hamish. And if you tilt your elbow a little closer to you back, you'll get more power."

The second prince tried the suggestion and the arrowhead completely buried itself in the target. "Hey, you're right!" He turned to thank his brother, only to find that the man had already run off in favor of trying to find Gawain.

The knight turned up in the armory, polishing the rust from one of their finer swords. When he saw the prince, he said, "Beautiful, isn't it?" He held up the sword and let Hubert admire the sharp, perfectly balanced blade. "It was one of the last your brother made, a prototype for his own. I can remember all the hours he put in to get it just right." He returned the weapon to his lap and picked up the polishing cloth again. "Now what can I do for you?"

Hubert cleared his throat. "I heard that you gave Hamish a bit of advice about dealing with Sophia yesterday, and I was hoping you had something that might help me."

The man didn't look up from the blade as he answered. "I only told your brother how Hiccup would have handled the situation. But I saw so little of them that I don't know nearly as much as some."

"Surely there must be someone I can ask for help."

Gawain looked up at the prince in front of him. The man's eyes were wide and desperate. "Tell me, why are you asking me this now?"

Hubert hung his head. "I heard Clarice saying that she doesn't think I love her. I need to change that."

The knight didn't bother asking if he did in fact love the woman. They were married. Love wouldn't change the fact that they were bonded for life, although it could change how that time played out. He decided to simply answer. "I do know one person who might be able to help." He put aside the polishing cloth and looked the prince straight in the eye. "Mark, Hiccup's servant, saw those two on a daily basis. He might have picked up a ting or two from the couple that might help you."

"Thank you," replied the prince before he rushed off to hunt down yet another person. And this one better be able to help him.

Mark was surprisingly easy to find. Repairing the damage done to the bedroom by Hiccup's frantic packing, he was relieved when Hubert showed up and provided a distraction. "Sire, is there something you needed?"

"Yes," said the boy. "Sit down. I need to talk to you."

_Thor almighty, what have I done now? _Thought the tense servant as Hubert sat him in one of the chairs at the table and took his place across from him. But his fears relaxed when the prince slumped. "I need your help."

"What about, my prince?"

"It's about Clarice. I heard her talking about Hiccup and Toothless earlier, and how she wished I loved her the way that Hiccup loves Toothless."

"Sire, I'm not sure what you're asking me." commented the servant.

Hubert sighed. How to say this? "What did Hiccup do to make Toothless feel loved, and how can I do the same thing for Clarice?"

Ah. So that was the problem. Mark thought about all the times he'd seen Hiccup and Toothless together, and a pattern popped out in his mind. "Sire, how do you and Clarice wake up?"

Hubert's head came up as his confusion grew. "What does that have anything to do with it?"

"Well, if Hiccup wakes first, he doesn't get out of the bed until Toothless also wakes, and they greet each other in a variety of ways, usually involving laughter. It's really quite sweet. After they wake, they get dressed and have breakfast with each other before spending the rest of the day going about their duties, together." He gave the prince a hard stare. "What are mornings with Clarice like?"

The prince flinched inwardly. He didn't have mornings with Clarice, his schedule didn't allow for it. His servant woke him at the crack of dawn and he got ready for the day alone, eating and leaving after giving the servant his wife's schedule for the day. He didn't see her again until lunch.

Mark watched as his words ran their course in the prince's mind. When Hubert thanked him for his advice, the man nodded and added, "They did occasionally have a nice dinner, just the two of them. You might want to try that sometime."

Hubert smiled. "I believe I will. Again, thank you." And he left the room with a heart much lighter than it had been that morning.

****Someone recently told me that I tend to neglect my supporting cast. This is my attempt not to slip into that trap. What did you think of Hubert and how I'm building his character a bit more?****

****Please Review! We're only one away from one hundred reviews!****

28. Meeting Daddy

He steeled himself and straightened his shoulders. "Hello, sir."

The man nodded. "Hello. Can I help you?"

"Yes, um," Hiccup cast around for a good way to start the conversation. "Are you Milady's father?"

"You mean your wife?" The prince nodded. The man smiled. "Even if it's after the fact, it's still nice that you thought to come ask my

permission. Come in." The man entered his hut and Hiccup, hoping he could straighten this out and still get some help, followed.

Hiccup set his pack down by the doorpost and looked around the small one room home. Well, not quite one room, there was an area set aside with a partition, a much bigger version of his changing screen back home. It probably had much the same purpose. His host finished setting a rather crude kettle on the fire and sat down in one of the chairs, motioning for Hiccup to also take a seat. He did, leaning forward on his knees.

Well, here goes. "Sir, I didn't come to get your blessing, Iâ€¦" he took a deep breath, "I need your help."

"With what?" asked the older man, smiling at the boy in front of him. Was he having the same problems Toothless had come to him with?

"I need to get Toothless back."

The man smiled indulgently. "Did my daughter let her temper loose? Don't worry, she won't stay away for long."

"It's not that," Hiccup tried to specify. Why was talking to this man exactly like trying to get something through to his own father? "She's been taken."

The atmosphere tensed as all thoughts of lovers' spats flew out the door. "By who?"

"Thanatos."

He leaned forward, mirroring the boy's posture. "Tell me everything, starting with the first time you met him."

So Hiccup, replaying their conversation in the ballroom, detailing what he'd done and what Toothless had told him after that. The other man would have been furious, if not for the fact that, when he spoke about how Toothless was forced out of the room, the boy's eyes lost their light and he leaned his head forward so his hair shadowed most of his face. "I came here because she said you could help me, that you knew things that could help me. Please." Green eyes begged. "I just want to get her back."

Toothless' father, Alpha, went over to the single window in the hut and looked out over the sea. This boy was willing to do anything to get his wife away from the man he saw as a monster. Thanatos would never think to watch out for such a toothpick as a threat. "To get Toothless back, you have to defeat the Red Death."

He sighed and walked over to the fireplace. He took the kettle off the fire and poured the hot drink into two earthen mugs, one of which he handed to Hiccup. "Death has taken precautions. He can't be killed by disease, wounds, or old age. Only one thing can slay him."

"What is it?" begged the boy.

"The only way to kill Thanatos is with a coal. It is the only thing that will penetrate his hide, dragon or human, enough to kill him. And he guards that jealously. He encased the coal in a rock, swallowed by a goose, stuffed inside a hare, kept in a stone chest at

the top of a huge oak tree. But to even get to the oak tree, you have to fight off its guardian, a white dragon with blue eyes that shoots lightening instead of fire."

I would come with you if I could, but Death knows me too well. If I were to even step off this beach or swim beyond the limits of the inlet, he would know and suspect I was up to something, especially after how I tricked him before for my daughter's sake. You would have to do this alone."

They spent a few more minutes in conversation, toying with different strategies. If not for the fact that Toothless was on the line, Hiccup would very much have enjoyed the conversation. It was nice to talk with someone on the same mental level who could point out the flaws in his plans, the biggest one being that he needed several players in the game. He couldn't go back to the castle because, as Alpha pointed out, that would draw Thanatos's attention and take too long. Who knew what he was doing to Toothless up in that castle.

* * *

><p>After the failure of a breakfast, Death ordered her back to her tower and to put on what she found on the bed. If she didn't, wellâ€¦it was best not to think about such things. And there was only so far she could push the disgrace of a skin changer before his temper got the best of him and he resorted to violence or worse. It wouldn't do to be damaged when Hiccup came for her. And he would.<p>

She entered the room and immediately reconsidered obeying. That black leather dress was probably only two feet long! A roar from the courtyard reminded her of her previous experiences here, ones that wounded her just short of scarring. At least it wasn't the slave outfit from her last time here.

She slipped the dress over her head and shimmied into it. The plunging neckline made her grimace. _Please don't let Hiccup come today,_ she prayed as she yanked down on the hemline and threw her hair over her shoulder, obscuring the top of the dress and the skin revealed with it.

Another roar ripped through the castle. "Get down here you shifting scum!" She forged her spine straight and unyielding, gave the dress one last tug, and walked back into the fire. At least it was black. You might take the changer out of the skin, but you couldn't take the skin out of the changer.

* * *

><p>Hiccup bid the man goodbye three hours before sunset and so he had enough light for the climb. He looked down occasionally to check if his prosthetic was securely wedged into the rock face. Alpha watched as he climbed the stone. He hoped the boy succeeded and brought his daughter home to him, even if she didn't get to stay for very long. He just wanted her away from the man who took her the first time.<p>

We jump back to Hiccup and Toothless in this chapter. And since I got asked a question by a guest, humor me.

****The green skin acted like a cloak, shielding Toothless from the effects of the chain magic so she was able to get away. But she needed a safe place to hide with the chain magic was wearing off, and that's where Hiccup came in. ****

****Please Review! My muse for this is currently in a coma and needs to be woken up by the sound of lovely reviewers. I'm actually not kidding, guys.****

29. Tunnels

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Hiccup washed his breakfast dishes in a nearby stream, rolled up his bedroll, strapped it to his pack, and got out the small disk with the needle and marking that Alpha had given him. The man had said it would lead him to the tree that held the much-protected coal, if, when he started traveling for the day, matched the needles with the Tallest mark and set his course one mark to the right. The prince didn't know how it worked, but he couldn't wait to find out. But before he did that, he would free Toothless.

He plowed through the underbrush, but his thick leather practice armor with metal pieces here and there kept out most of the thorns. A root tripped him and his mouth filled with dead leaves. He grimaced and spat the things out. Why did he have to be so clumsy? But the momentary stop of the crashing and scraping sounds of his passage through the forest let other sounds be heard, namely a soft keening.

He tried to ignore it. He whistled, sang, even counted his steps, but every time he heard one of those moans, he could feel Toothless' disapproval. She would never want him to turn down someone in need. Finally he threw his hands up in defeat and headed in the direction of the moans. He plodded along more slowly, trying to keep the noise to a minimum so he could still hear the soft moans. He came out into a small clearing and saw something he'd thought to never lay eyes on. A huge Whispering Death lie on the ground, facing a large hole filled with water. What had happened?

Okay, what did he know about Whispering Deaths? They liked rodents and other underground dwellers, made their homes by digging tunnels with their circular mouths brimming with teeth, and didn't like to move unless forced out of their tunnels. He looked back at the beast moaning at the watery hole in the ground. The hole must be its home, and it had to abandon it because of the water. Well, if he wanted to help, he'd have to get close first.

Slowly, Hiccup walked out of the bushes and towards the dragon. It lifted its head and roared at him, but instead of running back into the cover, he held up both his empty hands and stood his ground. The beast rose up and screamed at him again, but he just stood like a rock. Finally the animal calmed down. He took a step forward.

It roared again. He stood stock still and kept his hands up. The dragon quieted again, noticing how still he stood and the fact that he had no weapons. Hiccup took another step, and this time the dragon didn't rise up against him.

Slowly, he made his way towards the tunnel mouth and looked in. The hole went down several feet, and it looked like the adjoining tunnel was only halfway full of water. He looked back at the dragon, which no longer paid any attention to the skinny nuisance, and jumped in.

The water reached halfway up his chest and was absolutely frigid. It also had a current. That gave Hiccup an idea. He followed the current through the tunnels, leaving a stripe down the tunnel walls above the waterline so he could find his way back later. After his toes felt frozen and he wished for the sixteenth time that he'd just ignored the dragon, he heard a roar and was pushed back by a very strong current. Bracing his feet and hands against the walls, he lifted himself above the torrent and saw the cause of this whole thing. The Whispering Death had tunneled into the side of a river. It was a miracle the tunnels weren't all the way flooded already.

Wait. If the river kept pounding water into the tunnel, but they hadn't yet flooded, that meant there was an outlet somewhere that let water out of the network. He just had to find it. Hiccup let go of the walls and let the current sweep him away, towards the solution to the problem.

After a while he had to actually put his feet down and start walking in the direction the water pulled him, but he found the hole soon enough. It was about the size of his fist, probably due more to erosion than actual digging, although the water had certainly help tear out the opening. He brought up his prosthetic foot and pounded it against the wall. Dirt fell away and the hole grew by a few inches. He did this again and again until the hole was bigger than the other one. With this, there would always be a little water in the tunnels, but it would be much better than before, and Whispering Deaths liked their homes a little damp, if he remembered correctly. He swam back through the tunnels following his marks and climbed out the top.

The dragon watched him pull himself out of the tunnel before diving down into the network to see what the boy had done. It shrieked, zoomed back up into the open air, and coiled itself around Hiccup. He stood absolutely still. Had the dragon not liked what he'd done? Was it planning to constrict and suffocate him? Then he noticed that the dragon was purring. Of course! This was the dragon version of a hug! Just as he thought that, the dragon loosened its coils and dove back into the ground now that it had satisfied the need for gratitude. Hiccup laughed, shook his head, and continued on his way.

As he walked, he thought about his escapade in the tunnels. That current had been very strong, yet he'd swam against it for almost the whole time he was down there, and he still wasn't very tired. He tensed his arms and admired the smooth curve of muscle. Maybe Toothless was right. He wasn't as much of a fishbone as he'd led himself to believe.

Below the surface, the Whispering Death curled up in its now comfortably cool and moist tunnels and thought about the boy who'd solved the flooding problem for him. Perhaps a hug wasn't enough to repay the boy's services. So the Whispering Death deserted its network and flew discreetly behind the boy, waiting for the moment he could repay the kindness. He gave the kid a week to find something for him to help with. After that, it was back to the tunnels.

****You wanted problem solving, you got problem solving. I have no idea if this would actually work, so just go with me on this. ****

****Please Review! I haven't been able to write for three days, I don't have enough inspiration! I need a couple of good ideas!****

30. The Journey for Both

Hiccup had about twenty minutes of peaceful travel before more moans tempted his ears. What was with him and suffering animals today? Still, the last one he had had to help hadn't been all that much trouble, and he got a great bath out of it. He might as well check this one out too.

When he saw what it was, shame filled him. It was another dragon, a beautiful crimson Monstrous Nightmare, twisted in a net trap. His heart lurched. Who would do this? He dove for the rope suspending the cage, slid his dagger out of its sheathe at his belt and neatly sliced through the rope. The net fell, releasing the dragon which promptly pounced on the boy. It dug in the claws of one massive paw around him, caging the prince completely.

But it simply sniffed him for a moment before lifting off the paw and racing off into the woods. Hiccup didn't know it was heading towards the Whispering Death it had smelled on the boy, and would also decide to follow him in the hopes of repaying his debt. But the information wouldn't have been useful anyway. But with the dragon no longer close enough to scorch him, Hiccup sat down and pulled out his provisions. He hoped that Toothless was holding out.

* * *

><p>Toothless wondered the same thing about Hiccup as she looked out over the forest land, beneath a sky covered in menacing black clouds that threatened to storm. She was perched on the highest tower of the castle, the farthest away she could get from Thanatos without hitting the chain magic's barrier. He'd adjusted it since last time. She'd really hated the electric shock that ran through her when she hit it the first time. Some of the burns still hadn't healed, but luckily they weren't in too obvious of places. Thanatos didn't like it when his toys got damaged.<p>

There was a pull at the back of her neck as the second piece of magic Thanatos had added to her captivity kicked in. _Why couldn't he just call me when he wanted me, _thought the night fury as she dove back into the castle. Now she had to feel that blasted tug like a collar around her neck every time he required her presence, and if she didn't come right away, the spell itself would pull her down to him. She preferred to go to her doom with at least a little dignity.

She flew through one of the open windows into what Thanatos called the throne room and she called "where you play make-believe." She chuckled at the memory of the first time she'd called it that. He hadn't been able to look at her without turning red from anger. He really had looked like his moniker. But at least the windows were big enough to get through in her night fury form.

The Red Death was sitting on his 'throne'. "Ah, the princess has

sought fit to grace us with her presence. Now, if she will?" Toothless stripped off her skin and wrapped it around her now human body. "No, no, no. This won't do at all. A lady such as yourself requires moreâ€¦elegant garb. Cloudjumper!" A man wrapped in a stormcutter skin walked into the room carrying something over his arm. "Give the princess a gown worthy of her station."

The servant held up the dress for inspection, but Toothless was more interested in the man behind the fabric. He was tall, but built more along the lean lines of her husband than the bulky blocks of King Stoick. His long russet hair was pulled back from his face in a ponytail at the crown of his head, and underneath the bowed head, his eyes blazed. Hiccup would have liked him instantly.

Then she looked at the dress. A bit more modest than the last one, this dress actually went to the floor with a reasonably high halter collar. Then he turned the dress over and she grimaced. The whole back was missing! But the Red Death just laughed. "You will dine with me, and I request you wear this. Unless you would rather not." She was about to reply that that's exactly what she'd do when he cut her off. "You haven't eaten since lunch yesterday, and it is now dinner time. I suggest you think a bit more carefully before dismissing me. Rest assured, Princess, you will not dine without me tonight."

She reluctantly took the black dress from Cloudjumper and went up to her room to change. It would do no good for Hiccup or her if, when he finally showed up, she was too weak from hunger to help him defeat Thanatos. She slipped into the dress and shivered as the cold air brushed against her bare back. Thanatos was going to regret this if it was the last thing she did. Lightening crackled outside her window and she hoped that Hiccup found somewhere dry to stay until the storm let up.

* * *

><p>Toothless didn't need to worry. Hiccup had found a large cave and, thanks to the firewood he'd collected as a precaution against the weather earlier in the day, he was both dry and warm. Cooked fish were removed from the fire and he was about to dig in when a squawk sounded from just outside the cave. He stuck his head out and saw a Deadly Nadder shivering outside.<p>

And suddenly the dragon was Toothless, waiting to be let into the warm forge from the rain outside. It had been only a few days before their four-month anniversary, so she'd probably been working on the necklace somewhere outside when she got caught in the weather. Hiccup had lifted up the tarp he threw over the opening to keep out the rain and she flew in, landing soaked on the desk. The Nadder needed the warmth no less than she had that day.

He went back inside the opening, and when it followed him, he didn't try to scare it off or threaten it. The cave was big enough for both of them, as long as the dragon kept its fire under control and didn't get to trigger happy with those spines. But his draconic encounters so far hadn't been all that life threatening, so he decided to leave it alone. He sat back against the cave wall and finished his fish in peace as the Nadder curled up beside the ashes of his fire and went to sleep. He joined it a while later, hoping that, wherever Toothless was, she was sleeping soundly as well.

****Someone gave me an insane idea to turn my future Blue Eyes White Dragon into another form for Toothless. While I don't want to do that, it did make me think of a few things I could do with this story. The biggest one right now is whether or not to give Hiccup skin-changing abilities. He won't have to kill dragons if it's that way, but I posted a Poll so you can decide for yourself whether or not he gets to be a dragon.****

****Please Review!****

31. More Rescues

Hiccup woke to an empty cave. "Huh. Guess Nadders start the day early." He dug a hunk of hard cracker and some dried fruits out of his pack and ate breakfast as he found his bearings using the device Alpha had given him before setting off. The woods thinned around him until Hiccup was standing on the shores of a beautiful lake, with a tall oak on the other side. Squinting, he looked hard at the top of the tree and saw something too blocky to be a branch and too still to be a bird. "Yes!" He yelled, excited. That was the tree with the coal! He'd made it. Now he just had to get around the lake and he'd be within striking distance of the beast that took his beloved.

But of course fate wasn't through with him just yet. After about two hours of walking around the shore, his way was blocked by a massive water dragon spread out over the entire beach, which was unluckily narrow at this point. From his position at the dragon's tail, Hiccup couldn't see much besides the massive wings spread over the sand, so he climbed the boulder next to him to get a better look at the situation.

Well, the good news was that he could just walk into the woods to get around the dragon. The bad news was that, with its wing claw stuck in a crack in the boulder he currently perched on and its wings spread out like that, the Scauldron would dry out and die in a few more minutes. The beast had already passed out. Now that he knew the dragon's fate, that annoying voice that sounded a lot like Toothless wouldn't leave him alone. "Fine!" he said to no one in particular. "I'll go and help."

He slid down the back of the boulder and tiptoed his way along the narrow strip of sand between the wing and the rock until he got close enough for a good look at the claw. It was actually pretty simple. The dragon had stuck its hook-shaped claw into the slit and turned it to try and get something, but it didn't remember to turn it again to get it back out. So all he needed to do was turn the hook, ease the claw out of the crack, wake up the dragon, and get it into the water without getting bitten or sprayed with boiling hot water. Okay.

He walked carefully back to his pack and unhooked the long-handled frying pan from where it hung at the bottom of the pack and unstrapped his bow from the side. He looked at the two items. Which would work better? The small hole in the end of the frying pan caught his attention. If worse came to worse, he could hook the end of the Scauldron's claw in that hole. So he strapped the bow back onto the pack and headed off with the frying pan. He walked back along the boulder, praying that the dragon didn't wake up just yet. But it's completely relaxed muscles told him it was still out for the count. Whew! He eased the handle into the crack and pressed his eye to the

hole as he maneuvered the handle into place. With a twist, he flipped the claw into from its horizontal position to a vertical one and drew the frying pan out of the hole. Gently, he pulled on the bon of the wing and eased the claw out of the hole, folding the joint slightly and walking around to where the dragon's head was.

Now came the hard part. He had to wake the beast without making it think he was a threat. Maybe, if he used something the dragon liked to wake it upâ€¦ he looked down at the frying pan in his hand, then at the lake just feet away. This would work.

He filled the pan with lake water and stood to the side of the huge creature. He'd fling the pan towards the dragon and the water would hopefully hit its face and wake it up enough for it to realize it was free and get back in the water. If it didn't wake up, it was dead. If it went for him instead of the shore, HE was dead. "Toothless, help me out here," he muttered to the heavens as he brought the full pan back and flung the water sky high.

It was an excellent shot. The water landed right on the dragon's nose and its eyes snapped open. Tugging experimentally on its wing, the dragon roared its pleasure at being free again and dove into the water. Hiccup collapsed against the boulder. He was never doing that again. He walked back to his pack, tied up the frying pan, and started off again.

As he hiked along, he wondered how Toothless was doing. What was that man doing to her? Did he have her in chains? His steps quickened.

Was she getting enough to eat, was he letting her fly? Was heâ€¦no, Hiccup would not think of that. No one would stain Toothless that way. Hiccup didn't notice how every thought increased his speed until he was flat out running for the tree. But the sounds of splashing and squeaking brought him out of the worried train of thought and he looked over at the lake.

"For the love of-What is it with me and dragons?" There was a baby Gronkle a few feet offshore, struggling to keep its head up amidst the waves. Hiccup removed his pack and dove in, walking out a few minutes later with the struggling beast in his arms. He practically threw it back on the land. "The gods must really love playing around with me.

He looked up at the sky and cursed his dragon-loving heart. It was almost dark, and he didn't want to come across the beast guarding that tree at night. So he set up his camp and after a meager dinner of cheese and dried meats, curled up underneath his blanket next to the warm coals. Hopefully there wouldn't be any more needy dragons tomorrow and he could actually do what he came here for. Although he had no idea how to get a coal in a rock, in a goose, in a hare, in a chest at the top of a huge tree guarded by a massive and probably very hostile dragon. Hopefully he'd think of something in the morning.

****Even when I was writing the second to last sentence, I couldn't stop laughing at it! And don't worry, all the dragons will have their chance to help. Please visit my profile page and vote on the poll, since I will be writing the chapters about that very soon.****

****Please Review!****

32. Taming Blue Eyes

Hiccup somersaulted through a patch of charred bushes and tried to hide behind a large rock. When he'd woken up that morning and headed for the oak with the chest on top, he'd thought that, once he got close enough, he'd be able to see which type of dragon was guarding it and use what he knew to get it not to kill him as he climbed the tree. That idea had gone out the window as soon as he clearly saw the beast.

He knew of no dragons with silvery-white plate armor instead of scales, and the lightening that shot out of its maw every time something came within striking distance, even if it was only as small as a mouse, didn't help identify it. That just made his heart pound. The other dragons he'd encountered on the way had been easy to deal with, since he knew facts about them. All he knew about this thing was it had a hair trigger temper and very effective weaponry.

He put a hand on the ground next to him to steady himself and nearly had it blasted off when its sudden appearance startled the dragon into firing. He pulled it back and stared at the blacked patch of earth where it had rested only seconds before. Now he was terrified.

A snail appeared in the scorched patch and Hiccup braced himself for another blast. But it didn't come. The prince watched as the dragon watched the snail get closer and closer without firing on it. Could it be that the dragon attacked sudden movement and not everything as he had thought?

Untying the frying pan from his pack, he slowly moved the frying pan out past the shelter of the rock and waited to see if the dragon would attack the pan. It didn't. Hiccup let his hand extend past the safety of the boulder. Still, no attack. Shaking, he let the rest of his arm into the dragon's field of vision and hoped to high heaven he didn't end up with another missing limb. Still, the dragon did not attack.

He took a shaky breath and let his shoulder and some of his torso into the danger zone, listening with dread for the crackle of a white lightening attack. But it didn't come. Finally, he took the plunge and let his head out of the safety of the boulder.

The dragon was watching him intently, but not as if waiting to pounce. It was more the look that Toothless used to give him when he was inventing something completely new in the forge and he was wondering about its function. Was this huge white beast actually curious?

Still moving slowing, Hiccup stepped out from behind the rock and gave the dragon a good look. Once you got over how frightening it was, the animal was actually quite beautiful. He took a step forward and the beast growled at him. He froze. The beast stopped growling. Hiccup stood very still, afraid that if he moved again, the beast would shoot. Instead, when it saw he was no longer trying to get close, it turned its attention to its own armor, polishing it with

its tongue.

Hiccup slowly sat down to watch. It was funny how the animal groomed itself like a cat, even though it didn't look a thing like one. Hiccup scooted forward a little.

The dragon's head snapped up and stared at him. He stood absolutely still for a few moments and the dragon dismissed him, going back to its grooming. After a few more minutes of sitting still, Hiccup scooted forward again. This time, the dragon stared at him for a slightly shorter amount of time before it resumed polishing its armor.

After about two hours of peaceful coexistence, Hiccup rose to his feet and took a step forward. The beast didn't even raise its head. Hiccup took another step forward and the dragon looked up, but not in a particularly hostile manner. Hiccup decided to give talking a shot. "Hey. You look amazing, you know that?" The dragon visibly preened in front of him. Flattery would get him somewhere, it seemed. Making sure the dragon was watching him; Hiccup brought up a hand and held it out to the dragon. "Maybe I could help polish that armor of yours?" The beast stretched out its neck armor in response and Hiccup tentatively laid a hand on it. When the dragon didn't move, he started rubbing the area and bringing it to a gleaming finish. This could work.

As Hiccup polished, he got a better look at the dragon as a whole. The neck was long and elegant, and the head built along strong curves. The wings and body were not so beautiful, but powerful-looking. He was almost finished with the neck when he saw the shackle on the dragon's back leg. He needed to get a closer look at that.

Still polishing, the prince made his way down the dragon's body until he was right beside the chained leg. The shackle was worn on the inside, and the chain links had seen a great deal of wear and tear as well. This dragon didn't like being chained up, and would probably fly away the second it had the chance. And Hiccup planned to give it just that.

The white dragon watched with some interest as the brown and green thing that helped it polish itself walked back to where it had first appeared with a strange object that looked nothing like a weapon. Perhaps it was a better way to make the armor gleam. So the dragon ignored the boy as he aimed the head of the hammer and hit the lock of the shackle dead on. He looked up to see if the dragon was still watching.

Terrified green met with very angry and slightly pained blue.

Thor help him.

I got a very interesting review from a Guest, so bear with me while I answer their very funny critique. The animals are not dead, as we will see next chapter. And it's a folk tale, it's not supposed to make sense. The coal is a live ember, like you would get out of a campfire, and you'll see how it works on the Red Death in a few more chapters.

Oh, and don't tell Kaiba I stole his dragon.

****Thank you for the encouragement! Please keep reviewing!****

33. Repayment, Dragon Style

What happened next would be recorded as the biggest stroke of luck in the kingdom's history. Hiccup dropped the hammer in an attempt to placate the beast and keep from getting barbecued. There was a loud clink. Both looked down and saw that the hammer had fallen on the lock mechanism, already weak from years of the dragon's struggling and that first hammer strike. The shackle snapped.

The blue eyes took one look at the broken shackle, roared its triumph over the infernal metal band into the sky, and flew away. Hiccup picked up his hammer and started walking back towards the boulder he'd hidden behind what seemed like a lifetime ago and fainted halfway there.

When he woke up, the sun was high in the sky and he still had no way to get the chest out of the top of that tree. He couldn't just climb the thing, the first branches were about six feet above his head and the trunk was remarkably smooth. He sat down on his boulder to think about it.

Then something odd happened. The ground around the tree began to change. A line of looser earth started to trace around the left side until the whole area was dug up. _What in the world, _thought the young man as he stared at the now swaying tree. Then the Whispering Death from a few days ago burst out of the ground, trying to shield its eyes, and gave the trunk a mighty push from the left. The loosened soil couldn't hold the root against the dragon's force and the tree collapsed. The Whispering Death flew off, its job done.

After he recovered from the momentary shock of watching a beast that could have torn him apart with ease help him, Hiccup jumped up on the rock and threw both hands in the air. "Yes!" He could get at the trunk now! He ran around the fallen oak-really, it was such a beautiful tree, it was a shame to tear it down-and found where the trunk had fallen from the leaves. He undid the latch and pulled the trunk lid open.

A hare shot out from the trunk, leaping over him and heading for the safety of the woods. But before it reached the first tree, a Monstrous Nightmare sprang out and snagged it in one clawed foot, much like it had snagged Hiccup after he had released it. The hare shifted into a smaller goose and wiggled out from in between the talons. The Nightmare ran after it, but was intercepted by a Deadly Nadder as it swooped down and caught the bird just as it tried to take off. Hiccup watched as the dragons momentarily fought over the fowl until the Nadder squeezed it a little too hard and a rock came out through its beak.

Then he realized what that rock was. It had the coal to defeat the Red Death inside it! He leapt for it but just as he reached it, a wingtip from one of the fighting dragons brushed it into the lake and below the surface. "No!" He stripped off his heavier armor and dove in after it.

The floor of the lake was covered in sand, with no rocks anywhere. Frantically, he swam out into the deeper waters in an attempt to find it, but still nothing. He was running out of air, and time. Just before he kicked back to the surface, the Skauldron came up to him and spat out something. It was the rock!

Hiccup grabbed it and kicked back towards the surface, his head breaking into the air just in time for him to see the two dragons break up their fight and fly off in different directions. "Thank you!" he shouted, and he started swimming back to the shore, rock clutched in one hand. But his foot struck a stone and he fell, the rock getting knocked out of his hand in the process. He watched hopelessly as a tiny Gronkle sitting on the beach scooped it up in its maw and started grinding his only hope of rescuing Toothless away. He put his head down in the sand. It was over now. There was nothing more he could do.

A small growl made him look back up. The tiny dragon was sitting behind a pool of lava with a coal in the middle, looking at him expectantly. Hiccup's world lit back up. Of course! Gronkles ate rocks to spew them out again as lava for fights! The baby Gronkle had eaten the rock and thrown it back up as a fireball with the coal still intact! He unhooked his frying pan yet again and walked over to where he'd dropped his hammer. Using it as a sort of fork, he nudged the coal onto the pan.

Twenty miles away, the Red Death clutched at his neck, where his fire-holes would have been if he'd been in dragon form. A stab of fear rippled through him. Could someone have—no, the coal was too well protected. It was probably just a small cold, or perhaps something overly acidic that he ate. But he got up from his mock throne all the same. Just to be safe, he should go and check on the coal and its protection system. He activated the charm that summoned Toothless whether she wanted to come or not. He would entertain himself during the flight with her wing work. Even if it was forced, watching her fly always delighted him.

Back on the shores of the lake, Hiccup looked at the cast iron cooking utensil in his hand. This frying pan had done him more good than any weapon, even the ones he'd brought along, like his bow and arrows. It had helped feed him, solve the Scauldron problem, and now it was carrying the only hope he had of saving Toothless. Any regular soldier would have thought bringing it was a mistake, but it had been more useful in his quest than almost any other item. He smiled at the frying pan and looked for a place to camp for the night before hunting down the castle where the Red Death waited.

****Just to make sure we understand this, this part of the plot was not my idea. It came straight from the plot of the original Russian Folk Tale that I based the whole story off of. I just used dragons instead of the traditional creatures. So if it seems improbable, or confusing, that's why. Personally, I hope I made it work.****

****The big bad dragon is a Blue Eyes White Dragon from YuGiOh. I finished the series yesterday and almost sobbed over the last Episode. No! Yami's too interesting to leave!****

****Please excuse my ranting and review!****

34. Battlefront

Flying slowly, the Red Death watched with great satisfaction as Toothless cartwheeled and barrel rolled at the edge of the tether to stay in the air, since she couldn't hover like a Gronkle but would not fly in any direction except forward. She could have made it so much easier if she could have borne flying by his side for a few moments before rocketing back towards the edges of her restraints. But what kind of show would he have if she did that? He took pity on her and flapped hard twice, gliding forward and letting the barrier move with him.

When she felt the lack of pressure from in front of her, Toothless shot forward out of her dive and relished the feeling of finally getting somewhere. She knew where they were headed from the direction and some discreet words from Cloudjumper before they left, but that didn't matter. Just being in the open air made her much happier. That was, until she hit the barrier again. She growled. The Red Death loved playing with her far too much.

He chuckled as she crashed against the barrier again and looked out over the scenery. Where was that oak tree? He should have been able to see the crown by now. But perhaps he'd been going too slowly to get there so soon. There was no reason to suspect anything was wrong.

Still, his wing beats quickened.

When they landed on the shores of the lake and found a downed oak tree with no blue-eyed white dragon, The Red Death growled. The beast had finally broken free, it seemed. But how had the tree fallen, with no great storms? When he looked at the earth around the base of the tree, he got his answer. Those Whispering Deaths would leave him alone if they knew what was good for them! Now he would have to find another tree to put the trunk in. He began looking for his death.

The moment they landed, Toothless began listening for any telltale sounds of movement. There! A twig had snapped somewhere in the woods! She looked over at the bigger dragon, mumbling under his breath and not paying attention to her at all, before slipping into the forest, following the sounds.

Please, let it be Hiccup.

Moments later, she saw the green back laden with luggage and almost trumpeted to the world. It was him! She raced forward to touch him, embrace him, say how much she'd missed him when, inches away from his form, the barrier crashed against her outstretched hand. Curses! She roared her frustrations and Hiccup whipped around to see what dragon was after his hide now.

"Toothless!" He covered the distance between them in a single step and wrapped his arms around her scaly neck. They stayed like that for a few moments, simply holding each other before the dragon pushed him away and took off her skin, quickly wrapping it around her as a dress.

"You need to get out of here," she said. "Thanatos is by the tree. You need to get away before he sees you."

"Great!" he replied, startling her. "I have the coal. I can take him down now." A roar from the clearing indicated that he was right and that the Red Death had just found that out.

But Toothless still smiled. "Do you have a plan?"

"No," he admitted. "I don't even know how to use the coal, really."

"You have to get him to swallow it." Hiccup ran that over a couple times in his head. Okay, to do that, he'd have to open his mouth. Wait, did he have to be in dragon or human form for this to work? He asked Toothless. "He has to be in dragon form. That way, the coal can light up his fire holes and set all the gas in his body on fire, making him explode from the inside out. But how are we going to even get it there?"

"Well first, you're going to change back into a dragon and I'm going to get him mad. Once he opens his mouth to fire at us, in goes the coal."

She shook her head. "You'll never get close enough."

He smiled. "I don't need to." And he unhooked his bow.

A roar sounded through the clearing. Toothless covered her ears but the pull of the Red Death's summoning spell was already taking effect. Quickly, she turned back into a dragon and Hiccup hopped on her back, bow in one hand, coal in the other, and quiver on his back. He drew an arrow and jammed it onto the end of one of his arrows. "Let's go."

The Red Death scoured the beach, flinging the sand in all directions under his huge feet in an effort to find the coal. How had this happened? No one should have been able to crack that stone, let alone get past all the other protections he'd had in place. He called Toothless back with a roar, planning to make her help him in his search of the missing ember.

He was Thanatos, lord of death. He had gone through too much to attain this level of invincibility to give up now. He had slaughtered the king of now his castle and used his staff to plunder the neighboring kingdoms. Only the domain of the Haddock family had remained untouched by his onslaught. He grinned to himself at that thought. Once he had his coal securely hidden away again, perhaps he would visit that kingdom. They'd grown wealthy in the years since his rise to power. Perhaps they would be worth plundering now. But first he had to find that blasted coal!

Toothless flew upwards, to the very limits of the chain magic combined with the tug from the summoning. Hiccup leaned forward and whispered in her ear. "Okay. Can you swoop down and blast him? We need to get his attention." She warbled her yes and tilted her whole body downwards, letting the plasma pool in her mouth. As soon as she was in range of the blundering behemoth of a dragon, she let loose and the whole sky was filled with the giant's roar. The battle had begun.

****This is one of those chapters that I could have cut in half and**

attached to the previous and next one, but let's face it. I haven't been able to write and I'm running out of chapters. I've just lost the spark.**

Please review and help me get it back!

35. Aerial Fight

Hiccup looked back over his shoulder after their rapid ascent into the clouds above. "You think that did it?"

As the Red Death broke through the clouds, he smiled and leaned forward again. "Well, he can fly." Toothless laughed and zipped off into the clouds again. Hiccup had to grab onto her ear plates with both hands, and the arrow slipped in his grip. "Slow down!" he yelled. Toothless gave him a reproachful look. "Well sorry if it's hard to grip a bow and arrow while hanging on for my life." She sniggered and dove again, but this time with a little less speed.

They entered the cloud bank with the big beast still following them. Thanatos had seen the small red flicker on the end of the boy's weapon. He was not going to let that shrimp of a husband get away with his servant, or his life! Thanatos flapped harder.

Once the two were confident their pursuer was mad enough, they plunged beneath the canopy of the forest and flew nimbly through the trunks. The Red Death crashed through the foliage behind them, but with a bigger body and wingspan he wasn't able to make the same tight turns Toothless managed. Ripped trees and destroyed plant life was left in his wake, the force of the blows bruising his wings. Oh well, as soon as he got that coal and that infernal female dragon he would force her to nurse him back to health as he toyed with the boy for his amusement.

Finally he could bear it no longer. The Red Death loosed a stream of flame and burned the forest in front of him to a crisp, hoping to expose the rider and dragon pair. But they didn't try to hide again.

Hiccup transferred the coal burdened arrow from his hand to his teeth and slid another out of his quiver. Toothless flew right into the Red Death's face and Hiccup fired right into one of its eyes. Then she pumped her wings and sprang into the higher air as the Red Death threw his head up, trying to catch her tail in his teeth. But she escaped him by a hair before flipping around and heading back down as Hiccup notched another arrow. He had never been so glad for all those hours of practice for the day he shot for a bride.

The two swerved to the side to avoid another flame burst and dove for his head. Hiccup loosed his second arrow, hitting an eye on the other side of the massive head. Then it opened the other four eyes. Hiccup moaned. "You're kidding me!" Toothless rolled her eyes. Even in battle, Hiccup was still sarcastic. Still, this changed things. "Toothless," he yelled over the whistle of flight, "We need to step up the plan." She roared her approval and flew straight up to gain a better height advantage and give Hiccup more time to hit his target. They'd only have one shot at this.

They hung suspended for a moment above the giant enemy. Hiccup slid the arrow, so similar to the one that started it all, from his mouth and notched it to the string. Every lesson Gawain gave him, every tip his father and brothers dropped, every muscle reflex he'd built in the forge and on the practice field ran through his mind. As Toothless flapped the minimum to keep them in the air, he drew the bow string all the way back to his mouth, tucking his elbow in towards his back and keeping the shaft level with his body. The coal at the tip of the arrow glowed, fanned to life by the wind of the flight. They were ready.

Toothless turned her head downward and let the gas pool one last time in her mouth. She folded her wings in and dropped, letting loose her biggest blast yet. It hit the Red Death right on top of the forehead and he looked up at her roaring his frustration, anger and pain. Perfect.

Toothless shot down towards the open maw and Hiccup took aim. As the Red Death screamed his agony, the prince let the string slip from his fingers and propel the arrow forward. As the arrow flew, the coal blazed at the tip of the weapon until it was lost in the shadows of the teeth below them. Toothless pulled out of the dive feet away from the teeth and swerved to the side before a great pain ripped through her body.

She screamed and Hiccup looked back to see a huge fang puncturing her left tail fin. Ignoring the hiss from the coal beginning to take effect, Hiccup let go of his weapons and Toothless' ear plate and began climbing down her body, using her spine ridges as hand and footholds. Thanatos shook, wracked with pain, and Hiccup slid off Toothless' back until only one hand was keeping him from falling about fifty feet.

He hung there for a moment, focusing on his grip. If his hand slippedâ€¦but then he noticed how close he was to her back leg. If he could justâ€¦

Hiccup began swinging himself back and forth. Toothless screamed again as the pain of having her spine ridges almost torn out added to the jolts from her tail fin. But she continued flapping her wings and staying as level as she could. She was not going to let him fall!

Finally, Hiccup grabbed her back leg and pulled himself up, finally close enough to get the fin off the tooth. He levered the appendage off the fang and shouted, "Go!" She practically fell out of the sky with him clinging for dear life to the end of her tail, and just in time. The Red Death exploded only moments after they got clear of the blast range, although the blast still knocked Hiccup off Toothless and in a different direction from where she landed.

"Oh No," he murmured as he looked around but didn't spot Toothless. Where was she? He began searching for his injured wife. Hopefully he found her before anything else happened to hurt her.

I cannot write action scenes and loathe doing so, the main reason most of this is stolen directly from the movie. What did you guys think of the parts I added? Do they make sense, add drama to the story? Do I make my characters think too much during the battle?

****I have decided not to make Hiccup a skinchanger, although I will mess with his parentage a bit to make a few things about him more acceptable for the other characters. If you know what I'm talking about, don't spill!****

****The response to last chapter was amazing! Please keep this up!****

****Oh, and I got over my writer's block. Turns out I was just sick and didn't know it.****

36. Aftermath

The smoke from the explosion stung his eyes as he squinted through the grey. Coughs threatened to distract him and he clutched at a gash in his side from the fall onto some of the broken branches for Thanatos' earlier rampage through the forest in an attempt to find Hiccup and Toothless. His voice sounded hoarse as he ground out, "Toothless, where are you?" A black shape emerged from the smoke ahead and he practically fell towards it. "Toothless! Are you alâ€|" But it was just a stump. He turned in the other direction and called out again.

A soft moan answered him this time and he stumbled to the right. The black-winged form of his bride slowly penetrated the smoke and he fell to his knees beside her. He ran a hand over one of her wings. "Toothless, are you alright?" She crooned softly and reached for him with a foreleg. He scooted closer and let her draw him to her chest, holding one of her paws as she nuzzled the top of his head. He smiled. "I missed you too." Then he remembered her wound.

He pushed away Toothless' legs and crawled down her length until he sat in front of her torn tail fin. "Is this the only place you got hurt?" She warbled a yes. Hiccup released a breath he hadn't known he was holding and assessed the damage. Most of the bleeding had stopped, but it was still prone to infection, probably. And a smoky forest floor would make sure it got infected. They needed to move.

"Toothless, can you walk?" She hauled herself upright in answer, but he could see the pain in the stiffness of her shoulders. They had to get her help, and quickly. They walked, slowly to avoid aggravating their wounds, to the edge of the lake. Hiccup dragged Toothless' tail into the water. She hissed as the liquid hit the wound but he just said matter-of-factly, "We need to get this clean. Otherwise it'll hurt a lot more." Still, she didn't stop whimpering as he washed it clean of ash and other debris.

When he pulled the tail back onto the beach, he pulled a muscle in his back and the pain from the wound in his side doubled him over. Toothless wobbled over to him and nudged his wincing face with her snout, looking up with big concerned eyes. He put a hand on top of her head and tried to reassure her. "It's fine, it's not too bad."

But she grabbed his jerkin in her teeth and pulled it up over his head. The dried blood on the fabric tore at the wound and he gasped. She immediately stopped trying to remove the shirt. "No, it's okay,"

he said, trying to breathe. "I need to get thatâ€¦huffâ€¦.off to clean theâ€¦huffâ€¦ wound." He braced himself. "On three. One, two, three." She ripped the fabric upwards and he let out a scream, clenching his hands over the weeping wound. He looked up at Toothless. "Can you find my pack? There's bandages in it. Just hold your tail up so it doesn't get dirty." She went as fast as she could back into the forest to find the pack, trying not to let the pain get to her.

Hiccup turned part of the garment inside out, balled it up, and pressed it to the wound. He sat curled in on himself, hoping Toothless would come back soon. A few minutes later, she leapt out of the woods and crashed onto the beach. "Toothless!" He shouted and ran over to her. "You can't fly with a torn tail fin. Why did you try?" In answer, she extended her front paws and placed the pack at his feet. But he ignored it and grabbed her chin with one hand. "Don't do that. I'm not worth your life."

_But you are, _she thought as she pushed the pack towards him. _You are worth that and more._ But she still nodded so he'd leave her alone and take care of himself. Thinking he'd gotten through to her, Hiccup dug through the pack and emerged with a roll of white, clean cloth and a clean Jerkin. He folded the Jerkin several times until it was a thick pad. He pressed the pad onto the wound and wrapped the white fabric around his waist, holding the pad tightly in place with the loops. Toothless watched as he bandaged himself. Thank goodness the wound hadn't been as severe as she'd first thought.

Then Hiccup dug out a clean blanket and bandage roll. "Your turn." Toothless brought her tail around to where Hiccup sat so he didn't have to get up again. He looked up at her. "This is going to hurt."

She braced herself and felt pain, though not as paralyzing as she'd expected, coursed through her. She looked at Hiccup and saw him holding the wadded up blanket under her fin as he rearranged the torn flaps of skin into their original positions. Then he grabbed a hammer from the pack and used it as a splint to keep the tail fin open as he wrapped both the blanket and hammer into place with the bandage roll. He tucked in the end and smiled at her. "If you can stay on the ground, this should be fine. Wait, can you change into a human?" She shook her head. If she was going to fly again, that tail fin needed to heal, and it could only do that while she was a dragon. Hiccup's shoulders fell a bit. How was he going to get her to safety?

Then something swooped through the air towards them and landed right behind him. Slowly, Hiccup turned around and sawâ€¦|

A man with a high ponytail wrapped in a dragonskin.

Toothless growled and try to pull Hiccup away from the man, but he laughed. "It's alright, Toothless. I'm just here to help." He held out his hand. "I'm Cloudjumper, one of the skinchangers the Red Death imprisoned. Thank you for freeing me."

Hiccup took the hand and shook it. "It's fine. But if you'll excuse me, I need to get Toothless somewhere safe."

"Why not let me help with that?" Cloudjumper grinned. "The Red Death's castle is very comfortable, and not that far from here. I can

fly the both of you there."

Hiccup looked at Toothless. She'd probably spent the last few days with this man. Could they trust him? She nodded and he turned back to the man. "Well then we'd better get going."

"Terrific." The man wrapped himself more completely in the skin and Hiccup was suddenly looking at a huge dragon with four wings and eyes that made him feel very small. He lowered a wingtip to the ground and Hiccup used it to climb onto the creature's back. Then the dragon leapt into the air and grabbed Toothless around the middle with his claws. A few strong flaps and the trio were airborne, headed for the castle of their former enemy. Hopefully it had what they needed to heal from the battle.

****I tried to recreate the feeling of that scene where Stoick is looking for Hiccup after the battle, but I don't think I succeeded. My earlier decision to mess with Hiccup's parentage is doing wonders for the plot. I can't wait to post some of the more recent chapters I've written.****

****Please Review!****

37. Coming Clean

Cloudjumper let Toothless down in the large courtyard at the center of the castle, landing beside her. Jumping off the bigger dragon, Hiccup ran over to his wife and hugged her massive head as she crooned. "Are you still alright?" He asked. She nodded and bumped his chest with her nose. He laughed, then flinched and grabbed his wounded side. "Ow. Laughing, not a good idea." Something brushed his arm and he looked up to see that Toothless had wrapped herself around him and was looking at him like she expected him to collapse.

He was about to complain that he was fine when they heard soft laughter. The two looked over at a chuckling Cloudjumper, now a man wrapped in his skin. "That has to be one of the sweetest things I've ever seen." He smiled at them. "Let's get you two taken care of."

He led the two into the master suite where Thanatos had previously spent his time, on the first floor and not far from the courtyard, which was a good thing since neither was up to much walking. He pointed to the door on the right hand side and said, "Thanatos liked to have a separate room for bathing. You'll find everything you need in there."

Hiccup followed Toothless into the room and laughed when she gave him a look. "I'm just getting the bandage off." She rolled her eyes but let him remove the improvised bandage. When he finally removed the padded blanket, she whipped around and pushed him out of the room with her snout. He laughed. "Alright, I'm going." She closed the door with a wingtip and looked over the room.

Cloudjumper sat on the bed outside, waiting for the prince to exit the room. He smiled at the couple's antics before asking Hiccup, "Was there anything else you needed?"

"I don't know, some company, maybe."

Cloudjumper smiled and sat down next to the boy. "I can see why Toothless loves you so much."

The boy blushed. "She told you about me?"

He nodded. "Not much. She couldn't let the Red Death hear her, so we could only talk when he wasn't around. And she was only here for a few days. Still," he looked over to the boy and laughed, "she did tell me a fair bit about you."

Inside the bathroom, Toothless dove into the huge pool of clean water. She didn't know how it got there, she was just glad it was big enough for her dragon form. Perhaps the original owner of the castle had been a skinchanger as well. She frolicked in the water for a few minutes before settling down and scrubbing herself clean by rubbing every part of her body against the brushes inlaid on the edges of the tub.

Now she was almost certain that the person the room had been built for had been a changer. The built-in scrub brushes were perfect for someone with no hands, but the fact that a human-sized tub was in another portion of the huge room spoke to the truth of an owner with two forms. Either that, or the lord of the castle liked to keep large intelligent creatures as pets. She thought she'd go with the skinchanger option.

Once the grime and dust from the battle had been scrubbed clean and her wound stung like crazy from the soap, she hauled herself out of the tub and nosed the door open again. The two men stopped their conversation when she entered the room and Hiccup got up off the bed to have a look at her tail. The older man followed, and said, "Maybe we should take her to the infirmary. There's a few bandages and some salves there that might help, and of course the physician." But Toothless shook her head and then motioned from Hiccup to the bathing room several times. The other skinchanger laughed. "Of course, after Hiccup gets clean. Then we can tend to the both of you."

After the door shut behind him, Hiccup gingerly began to unwind the bandage over his abdomen. The gauze came away easily enough, and there was only a slight sting when he removed the pad over the wound. Then he walked over and inspected the tub. It was strange, with two metal fixtures at one end and a drain of sorts at the other. The two fixtures had nobs on the top, so he decided to give one a turn.

He twisted the one on the right to the left, and to his surprise, water flowed out of the tube under the handle. He put his hand underneath it and found that it was pleasantly warm. Leaving the fixture open, Hiccup let the tub fill with water while he hunted down some soap. Finally, he found some that smelled like lavender in a cupboard fixed to the wall and put the bar in a small dish on the side of the strange bathtub before putting a towel within easy reach and shutting the water off. He sat on the rim of the tub and removed his prosthetic and the rest of his clothes before slipping into the warm water.

Okay, he had to find the building plans for this place and find out how they made the tub. He was going to build one back home, because this was amazing. Then the sting on his side reminded him why he was currently in seventh heaven. He grabbed the bar of soap from the dish and began washing himself up, being extra careful around the wound.

When he dunked his hair for one last rinse, he stepped out and a few minutes later, joined Toothless and Cloudjumper in the main room. Then the trio headed to the infirmary.

As they walked, Hiccup asked Cloudjumper, "Who originally owned this castle?"

The man thought for a moment. "It was King Thoren and his beautiful daughter Valka." He didn't notice Hiccup's slightly shocked expression as he continued. "I was actually the princess's flying tutor. She was a tiny little thing for the longest time, but then again, that's how all skinchangers are built. I didn't hear anything from her after she left with King Stoick though. Not even a letter. Here we are." He stopped in front of a rather plain-looking door. "Let's hope Gaius is in a good mood. He's our physician." And the trio slipped inside.

I know they basically just cleaned themselves off in this chapter, but I don't like skipping things in a story, even something this small. Besides, I used it to hint at a lot of the other stuff I'm planning. What did you guys think of the dragon bathtub?

This is now my longest story to date, going by word count. It's also third in popularity, thanks to you guys. Keep reviewing!

38. Healing up

The smell hit them first, a combination of the vinegar from the table covered in brewing equipment, spices from where they hung, drying from the ceiling, and clean linen piled in one cabinet and covering the many beds in an adjoining room. It was a scent Hiccup remembered well from his many visits to the infirmary at home, due to the injuries his brothers often inflicted on him, intentional or not. Then a voice fluttered down from the balcony above. "Ah, Cloudjumper. What has our good master done to you this time?"

They looked up and saw a rather elderly gentleman, with curling, shoulder-length white hair and a long brown robe. Cloudjumper answered with a chuckle. "I'm not the one in need of your services. These two have that honor."

The old man looked down and spotted the two. "Toothless!" He shouted down. "But who's the other one?"

Cloudjumper smiled. "The one who made sure you'd never have to treat Thanatos-related injuries again." At that, Gaius hurried down the stairs and approached the pair before the other man intercepted him. "They were injured in the battle. Perhaps you could treat them before grilling them?"

Gaius nodded. "Of course. Have they bathed?"

"Just before coming here."

"Alright then." He looked over at the two. "Let's get started then."

The old man led both dragon and boy into the infirmary. He pointed

Hiccup to one of the beds and had Toothless lie down on a stone slab in front of the fireplace, stopping her from lighting it up. Hiccup sat at the foot of his bed and watched as the older man examined the torn tail fin. After the man put the damaged appendage down and walked past him back to the table covered in brewing equipment, Hiccup asked, "How bad is it?"

"It could be worse," answered Gaius as he ground up a herb with a mortar and pestle. "There are three tears and two of the bones broke, but she's a young dragon. With the right treatment, she'll heal just fine and be back in the sky." He went to the cupboard and rummaged through it until he came back to the table with a small bottle of something yellow. He measured out a spoonful and emptied it into a small mixing bowl, to which he added the crushed herb. "This," he continued, "will help the scabbing along and numb the pain. Cloudjumper," the man jumped up from where he'd been sitting on another of the beds, "Get me a splint and clean bandages."

The man ran to a bigger cupboard and retrieved the articles, handing them to the older man as he sat by Toothless' tail fin. Hiccup watched as he recreated the prince's slapdash bandage with more care and professionalism. As Cloudjumper helped tuck in the edge of the cloth, he said, "You should check him as well."

"Of course," the man said as he bustled over to the bed where Hiccup laid down. "I'm going to remove the bandages. It will hurt, but only a little. Cloudjumper, grab my smallest scissors." The man ran back to the laden table and returned with the tiniest scissors Hiccup had ever seen. He had to get his hands on those, to study so he could make himself a pair. Gaius cut through the layers of bandage on the other side of his body from the wound and peeled away the layers, removing the last layer as gently as he could.

The wound hadn't had time to build up more dried blood between his skin and the clean cloth since his bath, so it didn't hurt as much as he'd been expecting. Gaius told him to lie down as he inspected the wound. "Oh, this is nasty," he commented as he examined the prince's side.

"What's wrong?" asked the youth with a hint of fear, lifting his head off the table to get a better look.

The older man pushed him back down with a finger. He really was weak. "There's splinters everywhere in this wound. It's going to take quite some time to get them all out, and it'll be painful." He looked at his patient. The boy was so pale. "Perhaps we should wait." Toothless wandered over to hear better.

"No," answered the boy. "It'll only get worse if it's left like that."

"It'll be painful," cautioned the physician.

"I'm a Viking. It's an occupational hazard." Toothless brushed against his hand and he reached out to pat her. She slipped one of her ear plates into his hand and he gripped it. "Just get it over with." Gaius nodded and told the only other able-bodied person to grab his surgical tools and a flame to sterilize them, along with some more of the numbing salve he'd used on Toothless.

He spread the salve around the wound, letting it numb the edges of the torn nerves. Then he lit the candle and ran the end of the tweezers through the flame. "Are you ready," he asked the boy now under the knife.

"Yes," he answered as he gripped Toothless' ear plate. Gaius reached in with the tool, clamped it around the largest splinter, and pulled.

Hiccup whimpered with each tug, each new fragment of branch as it was pulled from his body. After what seemed like hours but was really five minutes, Gaius said, "There's only one left. It's buried pretty deeply, so I can't just pull it out. I'm going to have to make a cut." Hiccup nodded, giving him permission to proceed. "Cloudjumper, grab his other hand." The big man did so.

Gaius took the point of the knife and made a tiny incision under the tip of the wood fragment. Hiccup tensed around the tool and Gaius retreated. "Does it hurt too much?"

"I just don't think that area was numbed." The boy laughed.

"Should I keep going?"

"Oh, yeah, sure. Pain, love it!"

Gaius laughed at the sarcasm and went in with the tweezers again. The final fragment slid out of his body and Gaius reached for a pad and roll of bandage. "Hold him up, Cloudjumper." The man reached behind his shoulders and gently brought him upright so Gaius could wind the bandage around his slim waist. Then they put the boy back down and looked over at Toothless. "Get some sleep," commanded the physician. "You too," he added, glaring in mock anger at the dragon. She huffed at him but curled up beside her husband's bed all the same, letting his slack hand rest on her head. Cloudjumper and Gaius slipped out of the infirmary and closed the door behind them.

The younger of the two sighed. "I hope Hiccup heals quickly."

Gaius whipped around and stared at the man. "That boy was Hiccup?"

****Yes, Gaius is also stolen from Merlin. I think I'm keeping him pretty IC, though. What do you think? I realized that, if someone injured themselves on broken branches the way Hiccup did, there would probably be something in the wound that he couldn't just wash out. That's where most of this chapter came from.****

****Should I include more dragons from different places? There are so many to choose from in YuGiOh alone!****

****We have reached 150 reviews and over 23,000 views! Amazing! I'm just as excited about that as I am my job interview later this week!****

****Please, keep encouraging me!****

While Toothless and Hiccup slept and regained their strength from the battle, flight to the castle, and everything that can after it, Gaius pulled Cloudjumper all the way across the castle to the library. Then he ran off muttering, "Now where did I put them?"

The younger man looked around the room, admiring the tall shelves filled with books, the long tables covered with samples of different species, strange mechanics, and all sorts of knowledge that couldn't be squirreled away between pages. There were a few fireplaces with armchairs, rugs, and giant cushions gathered around them, perfect places to hunker down with a book of your choice.

He walked over to a shelf and ran his hand over the row of spines and started reading one when Gaius shouted from the opposite side of the room. "Found them!" He hustled back over to Cloudjumper, brandishing a bound stack of paper. "These are all letters Princess Valka sent me after she caught that arrow hunting and was betrothed to King Stoick." He looked down for a moment, remembering the day she'd had to leave. "It got so lonely once she left, and even worse when we found out what happened a few years later."

"I know. But how does Hiccup fit into all this?" Cloudjumper inquired as he led the older man over to one of the reading areas and sat him in an armchair.

"Well," continued Gaius, "Valka and Stoick grew to love each other very much, if her letters were any indication, and had no problem starting a family." He gestured at the stack now situated in his lap. "In fact, they had three sons. Stoick named the first two Hubert and Hamish, family names you know, but Valka insisted she get to name the last one. Here, I'll show you the letter." He untied the strings and leafed through the bundle until he finally pulled one out and handed it to Cloudjumper. It read,

Dear Gaius,

_ I hope your back has gotten better since I last wrote to you, and that Father is alright. I have excellent news. I had the baby! He's so adorable, Gaius, the smallest of all my sons, with Stoick's nose, although the man insists he has my eyes. So big and so green, Gaius! But that wasn't even the first thing I noticed about him. _

_ You see, after the initial cry he made and the midwife started cleaning him off, he started hiccupping. He just kept on making that adorable sound and when the midwife handed him to me, the force of the hiccups shook him in my arms. That's how I decided what his name was going to be. He's my little boy, my Hiccup._

_ I hope you and father can come and visit me, Stoick, and the boys soon. I've been a little under the weather since the birth, but the physician assures me that I'll be fine, so don't worry._

Cloudjumper stopped reading and handed the letter back to the elderly man. "She wrote that right before she died, didn't she?"

"Yes," he answered as he tucked the paper back into the stack and bound it back up. "That was the last one she sent me. You know what happened after that."

Cloudjumper nodded. "The king followed her and then there was no one

to protect the lands and keep order, since his Majesty had no other children. Wait." Cloudjumper stood suddenly. "Doesn't that mean Hubert, Hamish and Hiccup are the heirs to both this throne and Stoick's?"

Gaius stood as well, holding the bundle in his hands. "Yes it does."

"We have to tell Hiccup and Toothless!"

"Yes, but not now." The elder grabbed Cloudjumper's wrist and pulled him back into one of the seats. "We should let them rest more before dropping this on them. I doubt they had any idea just where they were and who they are to this place." Cloudjumper stopped resisting and let himself sink into the comfortable cushions. "Now, why don't we go through some more of these letters while we wait?"

Cloudjumper let a small smile creep onto his face. "Yes please." And he grabbed the top letter.

Back in the infirmary, Hiccup woke up a few hours after the surgery from the dull throbbing in his side. The numbing must have worn off while he was asleep. Toothless' peered over the edge of the bed to get a better look at him and, when she saw his awake face, warbled a good morning. He smiled and used his elbows to prop him up a bit more.

The action pulled on his newly bandaged wound and he hissed. In less than a second Toothless was almost on top of him, staring him down with those big green eyes. "I'm fine," he comforted. "It's just sore." He eased himself back down again and reached up a hand to rub her between the eyes. "How are you, milady?"

She crooned at him and held her bandages tail above his head for him to inspect. He nodded. "Looks good. Free of blood." She moved it back to the floor and shoved her face even closer to his, still giving him a very worried look. "I'm fine." He smiled up at her and propped himself up again, just enough to brush where her lips might have been with his own.

A shiver spread out from the point of contact all the way down her body and she collapsed in a puddle at his bedside. Hiccup laughed. "Well, I guess that's one way to conquer a dragon." She growled at him, but the giggle buried in the sound rather nullified any hope she had of sounding ferocious.

Hiccup let himself sink back into the mattress again. The throbbing in his side had receded to a dull ache and he thought that perhaps he could fall back asleep. But just as he closed his eyes to make the attempt, Cloudjumper walked into the room to check on him. He looked at Toothless andâ€|was that a smirk? "It seems someone has a sweet spot," he said with an undercurrent of laughter. "But it's good that you're awake," he added. "I need to talk to you about something."

****In this chapter, the characters began to figure out just who Hiccup was. They all had different parts of the puzzle, but this helped them put it together. I hope I gave that impression. I'm bringing in some more YuGiOh characters and dragons, if you don't mind.****

****Please Review!****

40. Calling all Ambassadors

A few days after the procedure to remove the wooden splinters to give Hiccup and Toothless time to heal so they could move without hurting themselves, Cloudjumper gave the couple a tour of the castle. It wasn't as grand as the one Hiccup grew up in, but the library was spectacular, with not just books but other kinds of knowledge as well, and almost every room was equipped with a balcony so Toothless and other skinchangers could transition from dragon to human right outside their rooms. Other features also gave away clues about the previous inhabitants, like the rack for bridles, saddles, and other equipment for passengers. Hiccup asked in a whisper, "Should we come back later?" when he spotted a beautiful streamlined black saddle of supple leather. She'd chirped a yes back to him and they'd marked the location in their minds.

Now Cloudjumper was walking them down a large hallway with portraits on both sides, with the men on the left and women on the right, funnily enough. "Why are they arranged like that," the curious prince asked the guide.

"These are the past kings of this castle," explained the man. "Their queens stand opposite them."

"Oh." Hiccup looked closer at the portraits after that little tidbit and noticed how, with each portrait, the techniques seemed to get better, and the clothing style kept changing. "Which one was the last?"

Cloudjumper winced at the insensitivity. For all Hiccup knew, the older man could have been the brother of the last king. But he probably hadn't meant it, so Cloudjumper just answered the question. "He's at the end of the hall, although he's not the last of the kings," then he muttered, "if everything works out." Hiccup didn't hear him.

The trio stopped in front of the last painting, a remarkably well-made portrait of a thin but tall man in long black robes and a cloak of dragon skin. Hiccup immediately began asking questions. "Was he a changer?"

"Yes," the man answered. "In fact, all our kings were." He gestured behind him to the rest of the hall. "They sought out girls with the ability so it would carry to the next generation. The only exception was when one of their daughters married into a different royal family. That happened with this king's daughter, actually."

"I know," interrupted Hiccup. "You've mentioned her before."

"Then you knew the princess?" _Come on, say it, _begged the man internally.

"Yes." The prince of two kingdoms laid a hand on the frame of the portrait. "She was my mother."

* * *

><p>Stoick groaned as he rose from the desk in his office and felt his spine crack satisfactorily. He motioned for one of the servants to come over and a young lad hustled to his side. "Tell Hamish I want to spar with him," ordered the big man. The servant scuttled off to deliver the message and Stoick stretched his limbs. Such a spar would loosen him up and relieve some of the stress he'd been under for the past few days.<p>

When Hiccup came to him two weeks ago and said that he was leaving to go get Toothless back, Stoick had tried to get the lad to take at least a battalion with him. He was the last precious of Valka's precious gifts to him, and the one who most resembled her. But the boy had insisted that he go alone. "This is my fault," he had said. "So I'm the only one who has to fix it." And he'd left the castle without another word of argument.

Stoick had been so proud of him, still was, actually. Hiccup was finally showing the courage their family was famous for, so he had respected his son's wishes and not sent anyone after him, even though he'd been gone two weeks today.

The servant he'd sent with a message returned and told the king that his second son was waiting in the usual spot with an assortment of weapons. Stoick walked out of the room, through the hall and into the courtyard to cross to the training fields just outside the gate. But the moment he stepped out of the doorway, three soldiers crowded around him and started talking all at once. He waved his hands for silence. "You," he pointed at the middle soldier. "Tell me what's going on."

"Yes sire." The man saluted. "We spotted a dragon not far from here, sire. We think it's headed this way."

But the news was too late. Shadows covered the whole courtyard as the great beast swooped down into the space. It was a beautiful animal, with glistening black scales and huge wings. But before Stoick could give the order to subdue it, the creature brought its wing claws up to its head. With wide eyes, the king watched as the beast stripped off its skin like you would take off a shirt and tied it around his waist.

The young man who'd been a dragon only moments before walked up to Stoick and bowed. "King Stoick, may I have an audience?"

The big man picked his jaw up off the ground and answered the question. "Yes. Let's go to the throne room."

"With all due respect," answered the blond youth, "I need to return to my home quickly. Can we talk out here?" Stoick nodded and motioned for the boy to continue. "I have a message from the kingdom of your late wife, Queen Valka. Prince Hiccup has returned to the castle and we need to discuss whether or not he should stay there as the heir and rule over the people and dragons of our kingdom."

Well, that had definitely not been what Stoick had been expecting. Then one of the knights, Gawain, he noted, walked towards the ambassador and asked, "Would someone other than the king be acceptable for this? He does have duties here."

The youth looked at the knight and to the slight astonishment of

everyone, smiled. "You're Gawain, aren't you? Prince Hiccup told me about you."

The knight was surprised, but recovered quickly and answered, "Yes. I'm flattered that he told you about me."

"Oh yes!" the boy nodded enthusiastically. "He said if anyone wanted to come as an ambassador instead of the king himself, I was to look for you. He also said I should bring back someone named Mark. Do you know him?"

The servant also stepped forward and introduced himself to the dragon boy and the three began talking. Meanwhile, Stoick called over Hubert. "I want you to go with them as my representative."

"But Father--"

"No," stoick silenced him. "You need the experience and I don't want to send Hamish. If you have any problems or are uncertain, ask Gawain. But I want you to be the one to have the final say."

The eldest prince bowed. "Yes Father."

"Good. Now go and start packing." The boy left the courtyard and Stoick approached the three men. "My son, Crown Prince Hubert will be going with you to negotiate. You may take these other two," he gestured toward Gawain and Mark, "if you wish, but my son is the one who will make the final decision."

"Of course, Your Majesty. When can they be ready?" The dragon youth asked.

"At the end of today. But first, I need some proof that you are who you say you are."

After the three representatives had packed and Stoick received a letter from Hiccup saying that, yes, he'd sent the dragon and was perfectly fine. The arrow fletching enclosed in the message gave it credibility, the same goose feathers with the iron arrowheads that only Hiccup used. Hubert, Gawain, and Mark climbed aboard the dragon and held tight to its spine ridges and the dragon tore off into the night sky. Whatever they found at the end, they hoped Hiccup would be a part of it.

I'll tell you who the servant is next chapter. Just know that the dragon is a dead giveaway and he's not very suited to being pushed around. For those of you who enjoy Fullmetal Alchemist and/or YuGiOh, I have a new piece. If enough people, say ten, like it, I'll continue it.

Please Review! I missed you guys yesterday.

41. It's a Little Different

The red-eyed dragon landed in the courtyard of the late Red Death's castle and the three passengers slid off its back and onto the cobbles below. The man undressed from his skin and tied it around his waist before turning to someone at the other end of the courtyard. "Sir Cloudjumper," he said, bowing to the man with a simple red tunic

and a dragon skin draped around his shoulders. "Where's Prince Hiccup?"

"He is in the library, as usual," answered the man. "Why don't you help the guests to where they'll be staying while I alert the prince? They'll meet in the throne room for discussion in two hours."

"Two hours?" asked Hubert under his breath.

But apparently the man heard him because he laughed. "It may take that long to get him out of the library. He's hardly exited the room ever since I gave him free reign in there." The elder prince smiled. That was his brother, alright. The Cloudjumper said, "Joseph will show you to your rooms."

"Alright," Joseph said, grinning. "Let's get you guys settled."

Hubert looked over at the boy in mild shock. It was as if someone had flipped a switch on the boy the minute they landed in the castle. Back when he was delivering the message, the boy had been like you would expect of any servant: stiff, formal, and never crossing boundaries. Now he was practically running through the hallways, telling the three of them to keep up.

Mark ran after the boy with absolutely no hesitation, and as a result was the first to see the rooms where they'd be staying. "This," Joseph pointed to one of the doors on their right, "is where you'll be hanging, Mark. Hiccup hopes you like it." The servant opened the door and poked his head inside.

Well, it was better than the servant's quarters, that was for sure. The bed was larger with a modest headboard and a small table beside it. A desk was pressed up against one wall and a corner of the room was screened off with the wardrobe close enough that you didn't have to come all the way out into the open to grab what you wanted to wear.

Joseph grinned at him, staring around the room. "Just get unpacked and meet me out in the courtyard when you're ready. Hiccup really wants to see you."

"Thanks," replied the servant.

The blond's grin grew. "Call me Joey. Everyone does." And he slipped back out of the room.

While Hubert was trying to wrap his mind around Joey, Cloudjumper was trying to remove Hiccup from around his latest project long enough for the prince and hopefully future king to go and see his brother. But Hiccup clung to his flight suit plans. "Just let me finish this calculation and I'll go."

Finally Cloudjumper gave up and simply watched him finish calculating the drag that the helmet he was currently designing would generate and how he could adjust the wing flaps to compensate for it. The minute he put down the pencil to reach for a different book, Cloudjumper swooped in and grabbed his hand, pulling him up out of the chair and stating that he had to go settle the matter of succession with his brother and he could come back to this later.

Hiccup decided not to put up a struggle and followed the man out of the room.

"So," asked Hiccup when he got his head out of invention-land, "who did Dad send?"

"Your brother Hubert, Mark, and Sir Gawain, I believe," replied the other man. "I told Joey to get them set up in their rooms. They should be meeting us in the throne room shortly."

Hiccup rolled his eyes and whined, "Great. Now Mark gets to laugh at how ridiculous I look in that huge chair. My feet barely touch the floor."

Cloudjumper laughed under his breath at the image, but was quick to jump to tradition's defense. "That is where your ancestors always met with ambassadors. It's tradition." Hiccup was about to complain that tradition didn't do anyone much good, but then he remembered one particular tradition involving an arrow and a wedding. That shut his protests up as they entered the throne room.

The room was beautiful, and rather like the great hall at home, but with a few extra touches. Huge windows bordered the top half of the room, with a balcony running all the way around the room. Two beautiful staircases led down from the balcony on either side of the room. Dragons decorated every surface, with many types that he recognized and some he did not. But perhaps his favorite part of the room, and the part that made him feel the most out of place, was the throne.

It was unlike any other piece of furniture he'd ever seen. There were no legs, no arm rests, no definite back. It flowed up from the ground in the shape of a great coiled dragon, the wound up tail and body serving as the seat. But it was a round seat, with the back coming out of the middle so that, if he wanted to, he could face any direction and still be seated. The circular chair was also big enough to hold several people. Imagining his mother sitting there with his grandfather was easy. Perhaps one day he would also share the seat with his children. Then he realized what he'd just thought and blushed to the tips of his ears. He distracted himself by focusing his attention back on the throne.

The back was the dragon's neck and head extended upwards, with flames shooting out of the dragon's mouth and topping the whole thing off spectacularly. The neck was smooth, in a scaled pattern so it was comfortable to lean back on, although a taller king might have had trouble with the spines on the head poking into the back of his own cranium. Hiccup would never have such problems, and he wasn't sure if he was happy or depressed about that.

Toothless bounded in through one of the doors as Cloudjumper pushed him down onto the chair. She hopped up beside him and pushed her nose underneath his hand. He laughed and scratched her in her sweet spot just underneath the chin. Then the doors to the throne room opened as Joey let in the three people who would help Hiccup decide if he would return home or start something new and incredible right here.

****Please welcome Joey! Possibly my favorite character from that anime after the two spiky heads. We only have about two chapters left in**

this story, period. I hope the throne was understandable, it's not your conventional chair. And sorry, but skinchangers are rather like blue eyes. Both parents need to have the gene for their kids to be skinchangers. So Hiccup has a 50-50 chance of having dragon kids, but neither he nor his brothers can do it themselves.**

****Please keep reviewing! Stick with me 'till the bitter end!****

42. Legal Matters

Hubert still couldn't quite get over his amazement at all of this. Joey hadn't stopped talking about how Hiccup had killed the powerful sorcerer who'd oppressed everyone in the castle, and how now he was learning everything he could about the skinchangers and his, no, their history. Because Valka was Hubert's mother as well. He had a share in this crazy world, and he wasn't sure what to think about that. Did he have theseâ€|these shifting abilities too?

And then there was the matter of succession. As the firstborn of Valka's sons, traditionally he would be the one to rule over this kingdom. But he already had a duty to his home, the world he grew up in, the place he'd been trained to govern. How did he suddenly transfer everything he'd been taught about how to govern one people to an entirely new culture? How to did you what was best for a kingdom you didn't know?

And it shocked him just how little he did know. He'd spent the first six years of his life with a mother who was part of this, and he'd never thought to ask about the rest of his family, his extended family. It made sense for Hiccup. Their mother had died shortly after giving birth to him, so he'd never had a reason to really wonder about that, and trying to make up for what he lacked hadn't left much time for questions either. But that was no excuse for Hubert.

Then Joey opened the throne room doors and Hubert saw his skinny little brother sitting in that massive, beautiful throne with an absolutely beautiful dragon curled up next to him. Mark noticed the black beauty right away and asked, "Who's that?"

Hiccup grinned. "It's Toothless. She's staying as a dragon for now to heal better." Toothless warbled and nudged his cheek with her snout. He laughed and returned the gesture.

"So she's a skinchanger?" asked Hubert. Just how much deeper was Hiccup involved with this part of their heritage than he was?

"Yes," the younger prince answered. "Actually, almost everyone in the castle is one. Gaius and I are the only humans, as far as I know."

"Who is Gaius," asked Gawain.

"He's the physician," he answered. "He helped get me and Toothless back on our feet after the battle."

The battle. Hubert had almost forgotten about that. "You'll have to tell us about that sometime," prodded Gawain from beside and slightly behind the elder prince. Leave it to Gawain to ask the question everyone wanted to.

So Hiccup led them to a more comfortable sitting room and launched into the story, with Toothless cooing or growling at certain points as Hiccup talked about how they'd met up in the forest before attacking, when the Red Death flamed at them, and she actually winced when he described how her tail had been injured.

"So that's how we ended up back here," Hiccup wrapped up the story. "I've been studying their culture, and it's absolutely fascinating! All the saddle designs and long range weapons they've developed, it's fantastic!" Then he slumped back against his chair. "But I still haven't found anything that might help us with what to do next."

"What do you mean," asked Gawain.

"Well, Princess Valka as the last royal this place had, and she had three children. Us." He gestured to Hubert and himself. "And Hamish, of course. But really, since Hubert's already in line for Dad's throne, it's really between me and Hamish. And as the next oldest, he should get the position. Butâ€¦"

Hubert saw the problem. "He wouldn't know how to rule this place, or its people."

"Yes," Hiccup said, relieved. "And I don't want Toothless' people to be ruled by someone who doesn't understand them. So we're trying to find a way to bypass that rule. Do you know of anything?"

The three ambassadors shook their heads. "Abdication wouldn't work. He'd have to be king first, and Sophia wouldn't let him give that up once he had the chance at it."

Then the doors opened and a shadow slipped into the room. Cloudjumper greeted the man, or rather boy. He looked no older than Hiccup. "Windwalker, good to see you. Did you find anything?"

The boy leaned towards the other man and whispered. Hiccup saw the curious stares of the others in the room. "Oh, this is our librarian, Windwalker. He likes to be addressed by the type of dragon he turns into, which is a windwalker. Very high flyers, but gentle creatures. Much like him, actually."

Windwalker blushed mildly at the praise and walked forward, handing a document to the prince. He thanked the shy youth and skimmed the document. Then he let out a triumphant yell. "Yes! This is just what we need!"

"Well, what is it," asked the other royal in the room.

Hiccup grinned. "There's a lot of fancy language, but I'll read you the important part it says that, in order for the needs of all who reside in the kingdom to be properly considered, at least one of the rulers must be a skinchanger. Hamish and Sophia are both human."

"How do you know? If our mother was one, we might be too." Hubert really wanted to know. Was he going to be able to fly? The idea was tempting.

Hiccup sighed. "Believe me, I wanted to fly just as much. But skinchangers attract tons of dragon by the time they turn seven, and it doesn't stop until they've chosen a form. They're also rather undersized through their teen years, but that can happen to some half-skinchangers too, so it isn't as accurate of an indicator. Although," he shrugged, "at least I know why I'm so scrawny now." He laughed, but without much mirth.

Hubert decided to move the conversation onto less volatile ground. He asked to see the document and Hiccup handed it to his brother. The elder prince scanned the sheet, looking for any loopholes or things that might provide a chink in its proverbial armor. When he didn't find any, he handed the piece of paper back to his brother. "Looks like you're the only heir that fits the bill. When's the coronation?"

****This is our last full sized chapter. Then tomorrow it's a short epilogue, and we're finished. ****

****Please review and check out my other stories.****

43. Epilogue

Toothless pounced on the little purple dragon in front of her and roared her triumph. Then she stripped the skin off the squirming dragon to reveal Angela, the little tyke. She tied the skin around her daughter and stripped off her own, turning into the girl's human mother. Then she proceeded to scold the child. "You were supposed to stay with Cloudjumper."

"But Mooooooooom," Angela whined, "he's no fun. He won't teach me cartwheels, or barrel rolls, or anything."

"Just be glad you can fly," Tristan added from the doorway. "I'm stuck studying swordplay. I think Joey enjoys bruising me."

Hands appeared on either side of Hiccup's firstborn and grabbed him, making the prince jump. "Come on, it's only to teach you to dodge," teased the blond as he dragged the protesting prince in the direction of the training grounds. Tristan huffed playfully, but when Joey let go of him he didn't try to escape the inevitable fate of more weapons training. "Oh, by the way," Joey said over his shoulder, "Hiccup said he wanted you to come with him and me next time we went to your grandpa's castle if you can fly well enough, Angela."

The little girl squealed and untied her skin. Moments later, the scaly little thing was flying off in the direction of the tower where Cloudjumper'd perched, waiting for his errant student. Toothless frowned at Joey. "I never heard him say that," she said, suspicion written all over her face.

Joey shrugged. "At least that way she'll work harder. And I might be able to convince him. He wouldn't want to walk all the way to the castle, after all."

"True," laughed Toothless. "I find him more often in the sky than on the ground, especially since he made those glider wings."

Then a Scauldron landed in the courtyard from the direction of the

coast and quickly stripped off his skin. "Milady," he said, bowing.

She sighed. "How many times to I have to tell you not to bow to me, Marco? But what is it you came to tell me?"

The messenger for the coast guard straightened. "We've spotted a large white dragon approaching from the open sea. Should we send out a warning?"

Toothless straightened up. "Did the dragon have tusks and black tips on the long plates by his face?"

"Yes," answered the surprised soldier. She'd described the beast perfectly.

Toothless squealed. "It's my father! Keep watching him and bring him here as soon as he makes landfall. I want to see him tomorrow at the latest. The soldier resumed his draconic shape and flew off. Toothless turned on her heel and headed for the improved forge/inventing room. "Wait 'till I tell Hiccup!"

****It's a wrap! Thanks for sticking with this all the way, guys. You've made it my second most popular story, as well as my longest one. That said, there will probably not be a sequel, which is why I gave you this epilogue. I have a lot of plot bunnies driving me crazy, with one Winter Soldier AU for Jack and Hiccup, Battle of the Brothers for all the anime with Ed and Al as the stars, and a teacher/student story for a Yugioh/yugioh GX crossover. Keep checking my profile, and go find other great authors to encourage.****

44. Just an AN

A lot of people have had trouble understanding some parts of this story, especially the fact that I would let a character marry someone from a different species, even if it turned out fine in the end. Originally, I was just writing it for fun and so didn't think much of it. But thanks to the incredible response this got, I'm going to rework it so it's more believable and, if it's still good, switch the names and try to get this published. It'll probably take me a long time, but I just wanted to give you a heads-up, in case you wanted to read the new and improved version.

End
file.